

ESC Insight

Unofficial Guide to the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest



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Foreword

Jerusalem 1979 – My first Eurovision memory.

Aged just 8 what sticks most in my mind were the postcards. Each featured 4 Israeli mime artists performing scenes representing national imagery of the participating countries. Surreal but strangely memorable. I also remember Milk & Honey winning the title in front of the home audience (they weren't a 'crowd' in those days).

Then I remember victories for Johnny Logan, Bucks Fizz and Nicole. I was transfixed by the voting and songs performed in foreign languages. Unwittingly I had become a 'fan'.

Malmo will be 9th Eurovision I've attended with BBC.

I've been part of a few UK highs (Jessica Garlick's 3rd place in Tallinn, and Jade Ewen's 5th place in Moscow). I've also witnessed a fair few UK lows.

I'm confident this year will be another high. Certainly Bonnie has embraced Eurovision with gusto. She has promoted her song throughout Europe, and has taken to the competition with an infectious energy and a determination to do well. For our part the BBC is supporting her with 4 accomplished backing singers and a team with huge staging, vocal and styling expertise.

As ever the UK fans will be out in force giving much welcome support for Bonnie. That support is very much appreciated.

For me being UK's head of delegation is a privilege and an honour. I have the best job in BBC.

So whether you're in Malmo or just watching from home, I hope you enjoy ESC 2013 and 'Believe in Bonnie' !

Andrew Cartmell
Head of UK delegation

Editors Introduction

Ewan's word...

Every ten or fifteen years, the Eurovision Song Contest manages to reinvent itself. This process of renewal has kept the show fresh, exciting, and on the cutting edge of entertainment. This year's Eurovision feels like one of those years. Changes have been made at a number of levels, drawing both support from the fans of the Contest, but also raising concerns over the impact they have on the Contest. There's no doubt that a Song Contest approaching its sixtieth birthday will have fans who look back at rosier times, but the length of time in the public conscious doesn't give this year's production team carte blanche to change the Contest beyond recognition. The goal is to leave it in better health than it was when you got it, and you can be sure that everyone involved, from the fans and the TV stations, to the production team and the European Broadcasting Union, will be looking very carefully at the reaction to the changes.

In all of this, let's not forget that we do have something very important to do. We have to take thirty-nine songs, put them in a musical arena, and find out which one will be left standing at the end of Saturday night on May 18th. Questions about commercial success to rival Loreen's from last year can wait, trying to work out if the change in the voting system has had an impact will be left to the spreadsheets of June, and working out why Bonnie Tyler performed as she did can be left for the UK tabloids. We've got thirty nine little flawed diamonds, and after all the intense inspection, interviews, and interrogation, we're going to choose just one of them, just as we have done since 1956. I can't wait.

Sharleen's word...

It seems that as the years go on, that Eurovision comes around quicker and quicker. Whilst the actual selection process hasn't been brought forward as such, we did see some earlier than usual songs being determined, with no time to really reflect on what passed in Baku, and certainly little time to mourn.

The songs that have been selected for 2013 are diverse, something for everyone, and a factor now becoming more common in the contest. We have a range of ballads, schlager, rock, electro-pop, ethnic-pop, dance, and even dubstep. Eurovision feels like a modern show once more in terms of the music we are seeing on stage. And combined with the fact that Europe is still being dragged through some tough times economically and politically, plus the success of Loreen's win last year, this show is once again something that no broadcaster could seriously point at and say it's not relevant to today's society. What I have most enjoyed in the lead up to the events in Malmo was the momentum that Sweden has built in the lead up. Every week (or almost every Thursday as Ewan identified in the weekly podcasts) was literally a new tidbit from SVT to get us excited. And for that reason, heading to Malmo promises to be a thrill.

We will be on the spiritual homeground of Eurovision – it's the country that gave us ABBA and that Queen of the Contest – Carola. What is there to not love?

Let's just hope that the next fortnight doesn't go as quickly as the past 11 months has felt.

Special thanks to...

Very special thanks once again go to our friend and creative genius Ben Morris for his wonderful minipop illustrations utilized in the guide.

Albania



At a Glance

Song: Identitet
Artist: Adrian Lulgjuraj & Bledar Sejko
Composer: Bledar Sejko
Lyricist: Eda Sejko
Performing: Semi 2, 14th

About the Artist

Adrian Lulgjuraj (32) was raised in an Albanian family in Ulcinj, Montenegro. He loved Rock & Roll music since he was 13 years old. When he got his degree in law, at the age of 26, he dedicated more time to his passion – singing. In 2011 he published his first track called *Te mori nje det* at Top Fest 8 in Albania.

With his second single *Evoloj* he won the award as “The best male artist” in Top Fest 9. Adrian worked as an assistant coach in the TV show *The Voice of Albania*, in the 2012-13 season.

Bledar Sejko (42) was born in Tirana, Albania. In 1987, he first took part in an international music festival, in Turkey, as a guitarist. His first performance on TV was in 1989, when he won the second prize with *Qeshu Rini* in the Festivali i Kenges. 1990 was the year that he created his hard rock band *Megahertz*.

He went on to participate in the 1992, 1993, 2005 and 2007 editions of the competition. In 1997 Bledar left Albania for Italy where he lived for six years. Bledar played more with traditional Italian bands as a guitar player and singer during this period. In 2011, he supported Aurela Gace as a backing artist in the Eurovision Song Contest, playing the guitar. This year, he will finally take the lead as an artist, together with Adrian Lulgjuraj.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Adrian-Lulgjuraj-Official>

Albania in Eurovision

Appearances: 10
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 5th
- 2012: Suus, by Rona Nishliu, with 146 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012.

Recent History

2012: Suus, by Rona Nishliu, 5th with 146 points.

2011: Kenga Ime, by Aurela Gace, 14th in the semi with 57 points.

2010: It's All About You, by Juliana Pasha, 16th with 62 points.

2013 National Final

Determined in late December 2012, the 51st Festival i Kenges was used to choose this years Eurovision participant. Hosted over 3 nights, 26 participants over 2 semi finals were whittled down to 17 acts for the final. *Identitet* won narrowly, only 12 points ahead of 2004 Eurovision entrant Anjeza Shahini.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A challenging and different entry, which is what we've come to expect from Albania. If ever there was an argument for an optional orchestra at Eurovision, 'Identitet' is it. The surprise winner from Festival Y Kënges, this new age rocker feels right out of the 'Concept Album' era of the seventies. Seriously, play this back to back with Rick Wakeman's 'The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table' and you'll know exactly what I mean. Edited down to three minutes, and relying on a backing track, this track has lost none of its power, and I think it will continue to surprise, at least in the semi-finals.

Sharleen says...

'Identitet' is everything I wouldn't expect to see or like normally at Eurovision, but I have a sneaking regard for the polished classic rock tune. The guitar riff sticks out in my mind as its crowning glory, but the presentation and vocal performance are striking as well. The original track at Festival I Kënges benefited greatly from the orchestral backing, but in reducing to a 3 minute track, it's lost none of its power. In a contest otherwise devoid of a good rock song, this should sneak through to the final.

Your Notes

Armenia



At a Glance

Song: Lonely Planet
Artist: Dorians
Composer: Tony Iommi
Lyricist: Vardan Zadoyan
Performing: Semi 2, 11th

About the Artist

The most popular Armenian rock band Dorians represents Armenia in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest, with the song *Lonely Planet*. "Dorians" consists of five musicians: Gor Sujyan (lead vocal), Gagik Khodavirdi (lead guitar), Edgar Sahakyan (bass guitar), Arman Pahlevanyan (keyboards) and Arman Jalalyan (drums).

Gor Sujyan, the front man of the rock band, never took music education but has recorded outstanding achievements in the music industry. At the beginning the band was performing songs only in English, but soon Dorians made a great revolution in their repertoire presenting their fans the song *Yes Kulam* which means *I'm Crying* in Armenian. The song became very popular because "it's about a greater love", as Gor explains.

Dorians first studio album called *Fly* was released in 2011. In August, 2011, the band performed during the opening ceremony of Serj Tankian's concert in Yerevan.

<https://www.facebook.com/doriansofficial>

Armenia in Eurovision

Appearances: 7
Debut: 2006
Victory: -
Best: 4th
- 2008: Qele Qele, by Sirusho, with 199 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2006 – 2010

Recent History

2012: -

2011: Boom Boom, by Emmy, 12th in the semi with 54 points.

2010: Apricot Stone, by Eva Rivas, 7th in the final with 141 points.

2013 National Final

On 22 January 2013, ARMTV announced that they had internally selected Gor Sujyan to represent Armenia. It was later decided that he would perform at Eurovision with his band Dorians.

The national final took place on 2 March 2013. A submission period was opened from 22 January until 20 February and 70 applications in total were received from composers from Spain, Belgium, Sweden, France and Armenia. Gor Sujyan performed four songs, with the names of the composers of the songs being withheld until after the competition. The founding member of Black Sabbath, Tony Iommi was responsible for the winning song.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Here's where it gets interesting, because the studio version of Lonely Planet has a lot of power behind it, with soaring guitars, a decent set of drums, and (for Eurovision) a decent guitar solo. So why do I keep coming back to the National Final 'live' version and wonder what went wrong? More to the point, which version will be on stage at Malmo? Once we hear the first dress rehearsal we'll know if it's the soaring studio or the limp live version we'll have in the semi-final. My money is on the latter.

Sharleen says...

My first experience of this song wasn't great to start – a 4am wake-up for the national final and promptly fell asleep before the first bar of the song was over. However in revisiting the song later in the day when I was able to give it the correct attention, I found it had the same effect. Gor is an excellent frontman – great voice, the right enthusiasm, but the song lacks the power that I have come to expect from Armenias' favourite musicians. Without something to attract attention – both song and band – I fear that Armenia's' return to the contest will be stuck in the semi.

Your Notes

Austria



At a Glance

Song: Shine
Artist: Natalia Kelly
Composer: Andreas Grass, Nikola Paryla & Alexander Kahr
Lyricist: Andreas Grass, Nikola Paryla & Natália Kelly
Performing: Semi 1, 1st

About the Artist

The 18-year-old from Lower Austria, who has US American and Brazilian roots, has been adding to her stage experience for the past ten years, thanks to a wide range of performances, and by participating in numerous music competitions.

Quite a few juries have been impressed by Natália Kelly's abilities as both pianist and singer. This early success is not solely due to her unique voice: her artless and self-confident flair have also given Natália Kelly's music an individuality that juggles playfully with contrasting elements from pop and R'n'B.

Produced by Austrian hit factory songwriter Alexander Kahr, *Shine* will be Natália Kelly's musical business card, bringing together her national experiences with international elements, and thus reaching out to her promising future. She will be releasing her debut album right in time for the Eurovision Song Contest.

<http://www.facebook.com/NKellyMusic>

Austria in Eurovision

Appearances: 46
Debut: 1957
Victory: 1
- 1966
Best: 1st
- 1966: Merci Cherie, by Udo Jurgens, with 31 points
Semi Finals: Automatically qualified to final in 2004, but missed out in 2005 and 2007.
Withdrew from 2008. Returned and qualified in 2011. No qualification in 2012.

Recent History

2012: Woki Mit Deim Popo, by Trackshittaz, 18th in the semi with 8 points.

2011: The Secret is Love, by Nadine Beiler, 18th with 64 points.

2010: -

2013 National Final

The names of the five selected finalists were announced on 11 December 2012, and songs were presented on 14 January. A 50/50 mix of televoting and the verdict of an international jury, consisting of representatives from Sweden, United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland and Serbia, decided on the winner. The show consisted of two parts: in the first part each candidate performed a former Eurovision winning song and in the second part the candidate songs that were in contention to represent Austria were performed. Natalia won the combined vote with 70 points, 20 more than her nearest rival, Yela.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

'Still alive and breathing...'

I've caught myself singing that under my breath far too many times during the last few months to not realise that Natalie Kelly's 'Shine' is a bit of an ear-worm, and that's usually enough for a solid showing at the Contest. But I have one concern about Shine. Watching it during the jury show in the ORF studios, then in the Green Room for the Austrian National Final, and during the Amsterdam Eurovision Concert, sung live 'Shine' does not connect with me. It took multiple listens to the studio version for it to click. Kelly does not have that option on the night, she has to nail it out the gate and connect instantly. If she can manage that, she's likely through to the Saturday night show, but it's a big ask.

Sharleen says...

Natalia Kelly seemed rather timid in her performance at the Austrian national final, but it was the simplistic song sung well that helped her to victory. It's a combination like that which saw the country return to the finals two years ago with 'The Secret is Love' – a song I felt was a dark horse in the contest. Overcoming that confidence issue, and teamed with what feels like an inevitable firework on the build up in the later half of the song, 'Shine' also feels like a qualifier and a mid-table result for Austria once again.

Your Notes

Azerbaijan



At a Glance

Song: Hold Me
Artist: Farid Mammadov
Composer: Dimitrios Kontopoulos
Lyricist: John Ballard & Ralph Charlie Al Fahel Farquharson
Performing: Semi 2, 4th

About the Artist

Farid, aged 21 is inspired by Azerbaijani music as well soul, jazz, and pop. He was raised on Mugham, a form of traditional Azerbaijani folk music and very complex vocal art. He is also a talented songwriter. At the semi-final of the national selection Farid performed his own song *Gel Yanima (Come to Me)*.

His competitive spirit is also shown in Farid's strong passion for sports. He enjoys participating in freestyle wrestling, which is regarded as the Azerbaijan's national sport, and Brazilian martial art capoeira.

By the age of 21 he has already got a considerable experience as a member of many Azerbaijani legendary music bands, such as Eastern Stars and Nightingales. Farid was honoured to work with such outstanding mentors in his country as Vagif Gerayzade and Aybeniz Hashimova before he became a mature solo singer.

In autumn 2012, as many other finalists of the Azerbaijani national selection, Farid took part in the casting process for the new international music talent show The Big Stage. There at the creative campus of the show Farid came to the Dimitrios Kontopoulos' attention - the composer of *Hold Me*.

<http://farid.eurovisiontalents.com>

Azerbaijan in Eurovision

Appearances: 6
Debut: 2008
Victory: 2011
Best: 1st
- 2011: Running Scared, by Ell and Nikki, with 221 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2008-2012

Recent History

2012: When the Music Dies, by Sabina Babayeva, 4th with 150 points

2011: Running Scared, by Ell and Nikki, 1st with 221 points

2010: Drip Drop, by Safura, 5th with 145 points

2013 National Final

In November 2012, it was announced 70 people were selected. Starting on 17 December, and over the next 8 weeks they competed in a grueling 4 shows per week of Eurovision and classic song performances in the contest to narrow down to a select 10 entrants for the final.

On 14 March, the jury selected Farid to represent Azerbaijan in 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

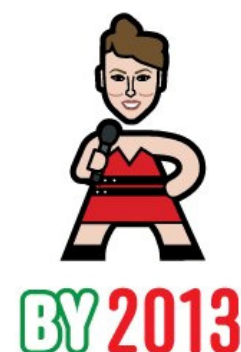
Even when they send an average song to Eurovision, Azerbaijan are dangerously competitive. They know how to put on a great show, they understanding the importance of staging, lighting, and marketing. And unlike some countries, they approach the Contest with a level of dedication and seriousness that means you should never count them out. I do find this song a little bit lacking, and I'd like a tempo change or two, but in a clinical Barry Gordy sort of way, I'm expecting another competent result from the 2011 winners.

Sharleen says...

I'm running scared that Azer could do it again. Yet another year of a good song and a proficient performer, and historically do fabulously well when they deliver such. Mammadov looks to have the performance down pat, and the vocals are spot on. They have moved from a Swedish production team to a Greek production team that also has pedigree, the country is not letting up in terms of promotion, and looking at that diaspora vote they are chasing with Turkey points to at least another top 10 for the country we all thought would not take it so seriously after their year of hosting.

Your Notes

Belarus



At a Glance

Song: Solayoh
Artist: Alyona Lanskaya
Composer: Marc Paelinck
Lyricist: Martin King
Performing: Semi 1, 11th

About the Artist

Alyona began studying music at a young age: At school, she sang in the choir, performed as a solo artist and as a part of various art groups. She graduated from the Belarusian-Russian University in Mogilev. Her career as a professional singer began in 2005, when Alyona took part in the "Slavianski Bazaar" festival in Vitebsk. The first music video was released in 2008.

In 2008, Alyona, for the first time, took part in an international music festival, in the town of Dobrich in Bulgaria. In 2010, her first solo album *Mazes Of Love* was released that included songs in Russian, Belarusian and English. Alyona Lanskaya also brought a victory from USA at the "Atlantic Breeze 2010" festival. In 2011, she was awarded the title of Honoured Artist of the Republic of Belarus - she has been the youngest artist ever to receive it.

In the summer of 2012, the songs for Alyona's new English album were recorded.

<http://www.facebook.com/Alyona.Lanskaya.Singer>

Belarus in Eurovision

Appearances: 10
Debut: 2004
Victory: -
Best: 6th
- 2007: Work Your Magic, by Dmitry Koldun with 145 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2010.

Recent History

2012: We Are the Heroes, by Litesound, 16th in the semi with 35 points

2011: I Love Belarus, by Anastasia Vinnikova, 14th in the semi with 45 points

2010: Butterflies, by 3+2, 24th with 18 points

2013 National Final

On 31 October, 80 applicants screened their entries in front of a professional jury during a preliminary audition during which 10 finalists were ultimately selected. While BTRC originally intended to hold a semifinal on 16 November, the organization decided to hold a single show on 7 December instead. The winner of the final was determined with a 50/50 mix of televote and jury. Alyona won the top points from both sectors with her song 'Rhythm of Love', thus being selected to represent after being disqualified the year prior.

On 19 January 2013, BTRC announced the possibility that Alyona Lanskaya could change her song. On 7 March BTRC confirmed that 'Solayoh', recorded by her a month prior in London, had been ultimately selected as the Belarusian entry.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

In an alternative universe, Solayoh would be this year's entry from Turkey, and we'd be talking about it as a potential winner. As it stands a lot of people are quietly championing this song, but also noting that 'it's Belarus' and expecting 'something' to happen to deny it the victory. This is one of my guilty pleasures of the year, and I hope it does well. At the very least I'm expecting Belarus to show up on Saturday night, assuming Alyona can manage the lyrics live.

Sharleen says...

I'll come out with it – I preferred 'Rhythm of Love'. There is something not quite genuine to me about Alyona performing this ethno-pop number, and the performance seems quite contrived. Vocally I don't think she delivers as well as hoped either, and for a country who tries to also 'over-egg' their staging, it could come off quite the mess on the night. There is a chance it will qualify for Belarus being their best song in a long while, but I feel like we've moved on from this sound that was so popular in the mid 2000s'. Feeling is we may see this in the bottom 10 if it makes it to Saturday.

Your Notes

Belgium



At a Glance

Song: Love Kills
Artist: Roberto Bellarosa
Composer: Iain James, Jukka Immonen
Lyricist: Iain James, Jukka Immonen
Performing: Semi 1, 15th

About the Artist

Roberto Bellarosa is originally from Wanze, Walloon. At age 9, his parents enrolled him at the Music Academy of Huy to study the rudiments of music theory. During singing lessons, his teacher was impressed with his voice and encouraged him to pursue his training at a higher level. Roberto followed this advice and took on singing lessons.

After acquiring more technique, he enrolled himself in a few singing talent contests, and decided to participate at The Voice Belgique. As the first winner of the Belgian edition of The Voice, Roberto benefited from a large exposure in the media. He then pursued his musical adventure and artistic career by touring with the "Tour des Restos du Coeur Belge" (including Patrick Fiori, Amel Bent, etc.) and by participating to The Voice tour.

This was followed by the release of his first single *Je Crois* and his first album in September 2012, *Ma Voie* was written by Quentin Mosimann, an international artist and his former coach in The Voice.

<http://www.facebook.com/RobertoBellarosaOfficiel>

Belgium in Eurovision

Appearances: 55
Debut: 1956
Victory: 1
- 1986
Best: 1st
- 1986: J'aime La Vie, by Sandra Kim, with 176 points
Semi Finals: Auto-qualified in 2004, and qualified in 2010. Did not qualify between 2005-2012.

Recent History

2012: Would You?, by Iris, 17th in the semi with 16 points
2011: With Love, by Witloof Bay, 11th in the semi with 53 points
2010: Me and My Guitar, by Tom Dice, 6th with 143 points

2013 National Final

On 16 November 2012, RTBF announced that Roberto Bellarosa was internally selected to represent Belgium at the Eurovision Song Contest 2013. On 20 November, RTBF held a press conference in order to present their internal selection and to announce that a three-song radio selection would take place on 16 December 2012 in order to select the song. Initially 6 songs by record company Sony were presented, but the organizers chose just 3 of these for the selection process. The combination of public (50%) and professional jury (50%) votes resulted in the selection of Love Kills.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I don't think a radio presentation was the best way to choose a song, but at least the Belgian public had a say in the matter. Presented with three potential songs, Bellarossa has been handed the one with English lyrics by the Belgian public. In a year with so many songs staying in their singer's first language, that might hand him a slight advantage. But he'll need to up his game from the performance at the National Selection back in December.

Sharleen says...

This song kills me, over and over. Not that there is anything necessarily wrong with it, in fact, it's just the kind of up-tempo easy-to-remember number that I tend to love. The problem is that Bellarosa seems uncomfortable in performing it. He is made for slower numbers in native language, more romanticism and depth than what this little pop ditty offers. The Amsterdam live performance was timid at best, and vocally weak. The national final has left such a mark on my view of the song, that as soon as I hear the opening bar of it, I start to wince expecting to hear some very off-key singing. Granted 99% of the audience wouldn't have had that experience and knowledge, but Belgium seems doomed to another year of non-qualification.

Your Notes

Bulgaria



At a Glance

Song: Samo Shampioni
Artist: Elitsa & Stoyan
Composer: Elitsa Todorova, Christian Talev
Lyricist: Elitsa Todorova, Christian Talev
Performing: Semi 2, 7th

About the Artist

Elitsa Todorova was born on 1977 in Varna. She studied music, specialising in authentic folklore singing and in percussions. She worked at the State Dance and Music Ensemble in Varna, in the choir *The Mystery of the Bulgarian voices*, and the *Cosmic Voices of Bulgaria* choir where she performed authentic Bulgarian folk songs, and compositions in Yiddish and Sanskrit. In 2003 Elitsa Todorova began working with Bulgaria's most popular and renowned drummer and percussionist Stoyan Yankulov. Stoyan Yankulov was born on September 10th in Sofia. At the age of eight he started taking piano lessons. At the same time he showed interest for percussion instruments. Since a young age he was the base of musical bands as a drummer, and he eventually graduated majoring in percussion instruments. Yankulov plays with rock and jazz bands, with folklore ensembles and with jazz-rock and fusion bands. Stoyan Yankulov has already won many highly-ranked prizes. Elitsa & Stoyan have already performed together on the Eurovision Song Contest stage together in 2007, gaining the fifth place in the Final with *Voda* - the best placing for Bulgaria to date.

<http://www.facebook.com/Elitsa.and.Stoyan.Official>

Bulgaria in Eurovision

Appearances: 9
Debut: 2005
Victory: -
Best: 5th
- 2007: *Water*, by Elitsa Todorova and Stoyan Yankoulov, with 157 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007

Recent History

2012: *Love Unlimited*, by Sofi Marinova, 11th in the semi with 45 points
2011: *Na Inat*, by Poli Genova, 12th in the semi with 48 points
2010: *Angel Si Ti*, by Miro, 15th in the semi with 19 points

2013 National Final

The Bulgarian entry was selected through a combination of an internal selection to select the artist and a national final to select the song, organised by the Bulgarian broadcaster. On 10 February, Elitsa and Stoyan were announced as the comeback kings for Bulgaria, hoping to select one of their 3 songs to see them through to qualification again.

The national final to select Bulgaria's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest took place on 3 March 2013, with 3 songs performed live followed by 50/50 televote and jury vote. After a tie between Samo shampioni and Kismet, the televoting results took precedence which resulted in Kismet being selected as the winning song. Due to copyright issues, on 11 March it was announced that Kismet was withdrawn and Samo Shampioni would be the Eurovision entry.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

What's Eurovision without a bit of controversy in a National Final? Two songs had to be split by the tie-breaker procedure, and the public's voting didn't match up with the wishes of Elitsa and Stoyan. But lo and behold, one denial of permission from the Argentina composer of 'Kismet' later, and the artist's favourite 'Shamo Shampioni' is given the ticket to Malmo. At least the singers have a song they believe in... even if everyone listening at home will be wondering how long they have to wait for the next song to come along.

Sharleen says...

I never liked the offering of Elitsa and Stoyans' 'Water' in 2007 that managed to grab them a top 5 spot. The vocal warbles of this Bulgarian couple were too harsh on my pop-tuned ears, but I could appreciate how such a very ethnic-sounding song could appeal to the region and the staging could impress Europe. This song is really just a mark 2 of the same tune, and whilst many remember that show and some Eurovision tastes have changed, I do think 'Samo Shampioni' could capture the same audience again to vote for it because it is so different to what else is on offer. Top 5 again? No. But qualifier? Yes.

Your Notes

Croatia



HR2013

At a Glance

Song: Mizerja
Artist: Klapa s Mora
Composer: Goran Topolovac
Lyricist: Goran Topolovac
Performing: Semi 1, 4th

About the Artist

Klapa singing is a traditional Croatian form of vocal music originating from Dalmatia, in southern Croatia. This year Croatia has formed a special klapa for the Eurovision Song Contest made up of singers who are young, but rich in experience.

MARKO ŠKUGOR - First tenor was born on October 25th, 1989. He has been taking singing lessons with the former lead singer of the Zagreb Opera, Stojan Stojanov.

ANTE GALIĆ - Second tenor was born on September 3rd, 1987 in Split. He sings multipart in the Sinj klapa, since he lives in the small town of Turjaci near Sinj.

NIKŠA ANTICA - First baritone was born on May 9th, 1976 in Split. After children's choirs and the Brodosplit men's choir, he was a member of the Split Croatian National Theatre. He sang in the following klapas: Šufit, Cambi Kambelovac, Iskon and Sagena.

LEON BATALJAKU – Baritone was born in Zadar on June 13th, 1980. Today he sings for recreation, as he put it, in the Niko klapa.

IVICA VLAJČ – Basso was born on July 12th, 1979 in Šibenik. He entered the world of klapa multipart singing in 2000, and founded klapa Teuta.

BOJAN KAVADŽIJA – Basso was born on June 14th, 1973 in Zagreb. He was accepted into the National Folk Dance Ensemble Lado and with them he travelled literally around the world. As a dancer he already performed on the Eurovision stage in 2006. He sings in the Grdelin klapa.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Eurovision-Song-Contest-Croatia-HRT/102329896604210?ref=hl>

Croatia in Eurovision

Appearances: 21
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 4th
- 1996: Sveta Ljubav, by Maja Blagdan, with 98 points
- 1999: Marija Magdalena, by Doris Dragovic, with 118 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006 (auto qualification), 2008, 2009 (through jury vote/save).

Recent History

2012: Nebo, by Nina Badric, 12th in the semi with 42 points
2011: Celebrate, by Daria Kinzer, 15th in the semi with 41 points
2010: Lako Je Sve, by Feminem, 13th in the semi with 33 points

2013 National Final

In November 2012, it was announced that Croatia would send an internally selected Klapa. The announcement of song and specially formed group took place in January, with the song publicly presented on 27 February 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Harking back to Eurovision of old, Croatia have sent a track that is representative of their culture, that's technically wonderful, and one of the few songs in 2013 that could continue to be performed if the backing track fails. It's singing in the zone of sleep that is the top half of semi-final 1 - but it's going to be the only male singing voice heard for the first half hour of the show. It has Slovenia and Serbia likely to vote strongly for them, but where can the other thirty odd points for qualification going to come from?

Sharleen says...

I applaud Croatia for turning to its ethnic roots and giving us a Klapa this year. It's a wonderfully melodic yet melancholic piece that leaves an impact with its harmonic singers, and I feel even with language barrier can transcend the Balkans. The only fault I can find with it is if the country insists on the 'dance routine' that looks extremely forced and unnatural in matching the performance. As I look at what the Balkans offers this year for its region in comparison, and the fact that these some of the few male singers in semi one, I think this could gather quite a few votes to push Croatia into the final again.

Your Notes

Cyprus



At a Glance

Song: An Me Thimasai
Artist: Despina Olympiou
Composer: Andreas Giorgallis
Lyricist: Zenon Zintillis
Performing: Semi 1, 14th

About the Artist

Despina Olympiou was born and raised in Limassol in Cyprus. However she studied in London where she obtained her degree in piano and music theory.

Olympiou started singing professionally in 1992 and she collaborated on stage, with great Greek performers such as Charis Alexiou, Giorgos Dalaras, Mimis Plessas, Marios Tokas, Glykeria, Demetris Mitropanos and Michalis Hadjiyiannis.

Her debut album was released in 2000 entitled *Ton Mation Sou I Kalimera* (The good morning of your eyes). Her single *Vale Mousiki* (Put some music on) was released in 2003 and it was certified platinum. Her second album entitled *Ehoume Logo* (We have a reason) was released in 2004, and her third album entitled *Afto Einai Agape* (This is love) was released in 2005.

Her single *Pes To Dynata* (Say it loud) which was a great success was released in 2007 and there followed her fourth album entitled *Mazi Horista* (Separated together) which was certified gold.

Her album *Mia Stigmi* (One moment) was released at the end of 2009 with eleven songs, the music which was composed by Michalis Hadjiyiannis.

<http://www.facebook.com/DespinaOlympiouESC2013>

Cyprus in Eurovision

Appearances: 31
Debut: 1981
Victory: -
Best: 5th
- 1982: Mono I Agapi by Anna Vissi, with 85 points
- 1997: Mana Mou by Hara & Andreas Constantinou, with 98 points
- 2004: Stronger Every Minute by Lisa Andreas, with 170 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004, 2005, 2010, 2012

Recent History

2012: La La Love, by Ivi Adamou, 16th with 65 points
2011: San Aggelos S'Agapisa, by Christos Mylordos, 18th in the semi with 16 points
2010: Life Looks Better in Spring by Jon Lilygreen and The Islanders, 21st with 27 points

2013 National Final

On 1 February, CyBC announced that Despina Olympiou was internally selected to represent Cyprus. During a press conference on 14 February, the Cypriot song, An Me Thimase, was officially presented to the public and press.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Wake me up when it's over?

Sharleen says...

With a competition so top heavy with beautifully sung female power-ballads, there will always be a couple that will fall by the wayside. Despina certainly has a lot of experience behind her – she is a mature and wonderful performer, and she won't fail to deliver well on the night, but the issues are the song itself lacks a power-punch and the presentation will most likely not have the impact of your Russias and Ukraines in the competition. Shamefully, this is what will leave her on the sidelines at the semi-final stage.

Your Notes

Denmark



At a Glance

Song: Only Teardrops
Artist: Emmelie de Forest
Composer: Lise Cabble, Julia Fabrin Jakobsen,
Thomas Stengaard
Lyricist: Lise Cabble, Julia Fabrin Jakobsen,
Thomas Stengaard
Performing: Semi 1, 5th

About the Artist

Emmelie de Forest, age 20, grew up in the town of Mariager in the North Denmark region, Emmelie started singing professionally from an early age. Since she was 14, she has been touring all over Denmark with the Scottish musician Fraser Neill, performing both own songs and folk/blues-versions of hits from the likes of Nirvana and Johnny Cash.

<http://www.facebook.com/drmelodigrandprix>

Denmark in Eurovision

Appearances: 42
Debut: 1957
Victory: 2
- 1963: Dansevise by Grethe and Jørgen Ingmann, with 42 points
- 2000: Fly on the Wings of Love by The Olsen Brothers, with 195 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2005, 2006, 2008-2012

Recent History

2012: Shouldve Known Better, by Soluna Samay, 23rd with 21 points
2011: A New Tomorrow, by A Friend in London, 5th with 134 points
2010: In a Moment Like This by Chaneë and N'evergreen, 4th with 149 points

2013 National Final

Dansk Melodi Grand Prix 2013 took place on 26 January 2013 at Jyske Bank Boxen in Herning. 10 songs competed and were announced on 16 January. The winning song was selected in two rounds of voting. In the first round, viewers and a professional jury selected the top 3 songs which proceeded to the superfinal.

After jury votes in the superfinal were announced, Mohamed Ali and Emmelie were tied with 11 points, however the 50% of the total televote for Emmelie resulted in her decisive win, 7 points ahead of second place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Some Eurovision songs are clearly of their time. You could not put Euphoria into the middle of the 1983 Contest without it sounding horribly out of place. But Only Teardrops? It's every mythical Irish entry for the last thirty years. There is a hint of the modern variant of the 'Wall of Sound' technique going on here, and it's unlikely Harrogate could have survived the amount of pyro the Danes will use, but this is a song we've heard countless times before. For the fans it's a comfy blanket of familiarity. If the general public are distracted, Emmelie will do very well, but I think the public are a bit smarter than that.

Sharleen says...

The clear favourite heading into Eurovision, and I'll be honest I have been wondering why. 'Only Teardrops' feels like an extension of what Denmark have delivered time and time again since 2000 – a nice, well-staged, mid-tempo toe-tapper. It has served them well in the past result wise, but I am just not entirely convinced that it will run away with 1st place like currently predicted in the odds and OGAE fan vote. When it was selected at DMGP, it wasn't a decisive win from Emmelie and few fans were enthusiastic of its selection. Even in hindsight, comparing to the rest of the field, it personally doesn't scream winner to me. If it does win, I feel it will be by a very tight margin (as will the rest of the top 5) but in reality I expect a sneak into 5th-10th place.

Your Notes

Estonia



At a Glance

Song: Et Uus Saaks Alguse
Artist: Birgit
Composer: Mihkel Mattisen
Lyricist: Mihkel Mattisen/Silvia Soro
Performing: Semi 1, 2nd

About the Artist

Birgit began her professional career in 2007 when she won the first ever series of Estonian Pop Idol. In 2009 she teamed up with the internationally acclaimed deep house production duo Rulers of the Deep on the album *Teineteisel Pool* ('The Other Side'). A showcase of intelligent club music, it won her the award of the Female Artist of the Year 2010 in Estonia. In 2010 she took the role of Maria von Trapp in the 'The Sound of Music' in Estonia. She has also taken part in the national selection for Eurovision on two previous occasions, in 2008 and 2012.

<http://www.facebook.com/birgit.oigemeel.official>

Estonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 19
Debut: 1994
Victory: 1
- 2001: Everybody by Tanel Padar Dave Benton & 2XL, with 198 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2009, 2010-2012

Recent History

2012: Kuula, by Ott Lepland, 6th with 120 points
2011: Rockefeller Street, by Getter Jaani,, 24th with 44 points
2010: Siren by Malcolm Lincoln, 14th in the semi with 39 points

2013 National Final

On 12 September 2012, ERR announced the selection details for Eesti Laul 2013, announcing that the format would include two 10 song semifinals on 16 and 23 February 2013 and a final between 5 qualifiers from each semifinal on 2 March 2013. Five songs from each semifinal, all together 10 songs, competed in the first round of the competition where a jury (50%) and public televote (50%) decided the top 2 - Birgit Õigemeel and Grete Paia, who proceeded to the super final. Birgit won narrowly with just 51% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's not Winny Puuh, so it's dead to me. You see, Estonia had a song that would change Eurovision, that would have brought a new genre to the Contest, from a band that's gathering coverage around the world for coming third at Eesti Laul. Instead the two grandparents parachuted into the jury ensured that we'd get another instantly forgettable 'girl on a dark stage in a white dress in a solitary spotlight' and three minutes of inoffensive middle of the road balladeering in the semi-final. But not the Final.

Sharleen says...

Estonia are delivering a nice, beautifully sung ballad by a female, and in a language that without a doubt holds a mystic quality that I can't help but be drawn to. Birgit is lovely, the staging seems lovely, the song is lovely. Lovely as it may be, I don't feel obliged to vote for it. It simply fills a gap of 3 minutes that I hope I won't lose focus during. I believe, again like Cyprus, that compared to the other entries in the female-ballad heavy semi, will fall by the way side and not see Saturday.

Your Notes

FYR Macedonia



At a Glance

Song: Pred Da Se Razdeni
Artist: Esma & Lozano
Composer: Darko Dimitrov / Lazar Cvetkovski /
Simeon Atanasov
Lyricist: Magdalena Cvetkovska
Performing: Semi 2, 3rd

About the Artist

Esma Redzepova Teodosievska was born on 8th August 1943. Esma started her career when she was a schoolgirl. First she performed in all school events, and one day she was nominated by the Principal of the school to represent the school on one very popular radio show called "The microphone is yours", organised by Radio Skopje. That was in 1957 and Esma took the first prize in the competition. Her career expanded rapidly and she became very famous all over the world. In 1960 she performed in Paris Olympia. In 1958 she recorded her first record, with the legendary song *Zoshto Si Me Majko Rodila*, and after that her greatest hit *Chaje Shukarije*. In 1976 in India, in a city of Chandigarh, on the First Gypsy World Festival, she was crowned as the Queen of Gypsy. Vlatko Lozanoski - Lozano is a Macedonian singer from Kičevo - F.Y.R. Macedonia. His first public appearance was as a participant in the talent show Mak Stars (September 2007 - May 2008). In 2008, he won the Grand Prix on the first Macedonian Radio, the Debut Prize at MakFest, as well as the MakFest Grand Prix, awarded by the audience. *The Sun Doesn't Shine On Me* also became his greatest hit and it was officially declared the biggest Macedonian radio hit of the year. In 2009 and 2010 he participated the national selection for the Eurovision Song Contest. He ended up in the fourth place on both occasions. He won the first place at the Macedonian Radio Festival in 2011. The second album *Over Seven Seas* was released in June 2012, and he won the second place at the Macedonian Radio Festival Mars 2012.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Esma-Lozano-Official-Fanpage-Eurovision-2013-Macedonia/428305880591893?fref=ts>

FYR Macedonia in Eurovision

Appearances: 13
Debut: 1998
Victory: -
Best: 12th
- 2006: Ninanajna by Elena Risteska, with 56 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2007, 2012

Recent History

2012: Crno I Belo, by Kaliopi, 13th with 71 points
2011: Rusinka, by Vlatko Ilievski, 16th in the semi with 36 points
2010: Jas ja imam silata by Gjoko Taneski, 15th in the semi with 37 points

2013 National Final

On 11 December 2012, it was reported that MRT would opt for an internal selection. On 29 December 2012, MRT announced that Esma Redzepova and Vlatko Lozanoski would represent the nation. MRT aired a special presentation show on 27 February, screening the selected song Imperija. On 8 March, it was replaced with a new song, and on 15 March "Pred da se razdeni", was first aired.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

You go from Kalliope to this? You take a perfectly good song in 'Imperija' that showcases the odd couple of Vlatko and Esme and replace it with 'Pred Da Se Razdeni'? You reduce Esme to the punchline of every commentators 'it ain't over till the lady sings?'. Wow.

Sharleen says...

In summary, Macedonia first presented what was an excellent piece of ethno-pop that reeled me in ready to cheer the country for a second year in a row. It gelled – in the style, in the duo. This just doesn't. It's exactly what you expect when you change a song at the last minute; it's everything and the kitchen sink, it's a complete clash of sound, of singers, it's a red hot mess. The country deserves better, Esma and Vlatko deserve better. But this song deserves to stay in the semi.

Your Notes

Finland



At a Glance

Song: Marry Me
Artist: Krista Siegfriids
Composer: Krista Siegfriids, Erik Nyholm, Kristoffer Karlsson, Jessica Lundström
Lyricist: Krista Siegfriids, Erik Nyholm, Kristoffer Karlsson, Jessica Lundström
Performing: Semi 2, 5th

About the Artist

Krista Siegfriids came to prominence following her energetic performances at the tv-show *The Voice of Finland*. Subsequently, the multit talented Krista has taken Finland by a storm, winning the nation's adoration with her catchy tunes, extravagant and stylish shows and her outspoken and sunny personality. Krista's debut album is released on the 10th of May.

<http://www.facebook.com/kristasiegfridsofficial>

Finland in Eurovision

Appearances: 47
Debut: 1961
Victory: 1
- 2006: Hard Rock Hallelujah by Lordi, with 292 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006-2011

Recent History

2012: När Jag Blundar, by Pernilla, 12th in the semi with 41 points
2011: Da Da Dam, by Paradise Oskar, 21st with 57 points
2010: Työlki ellää by Kuunkuiskaajat, 11th in the semi with 49 points

2013 National Final

The Finnish entry was selected through the national selection *Uuden Musiikin Kilpailu* (UMK), which consisted of a three introduction shows, three elimination shows and a final, organised by the Finnish broadcaster. In a three-episode documentary series spanning three weeks from the 27 December 2012 to 10 January 2013, the 12 finalists introduced themselves to the Finnish public. After that, three live gigs from the club "Circus" in Helsinki took place each week from the 17–31 January, after which four artists were eliminated. The final with the remaining eight artists took place in the Barona Areena in Espoo on 9 February 2013. Krista won with 26.6% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

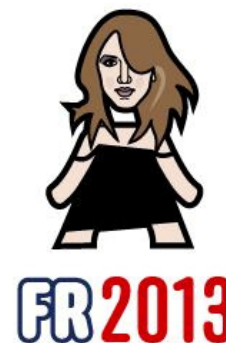
Lyrics aside, this has to be the *happiest* song in the whole contest. Putting aside any parental thoughts about lines like 'skipping dinner to get thinner' it's the one song that puts a smile on my face every time I hear it. Insanely catchy, with the ability to have the first time listener singing along before three minutes are up, I think the Finnish Sex and the City musical plotline is going to surprise many and perform very well in Malmo. An awkward semi final draw won't be enough to stop Krista getting to the altar, but who will she meet there? Has the Contest moved on from the T.a.T.u controversy of 2003? And will the heightened cartoon antics translate across Europe? So many questions...

Sharleen says...

Can't Eurovision have a little joy and smile anymore? Judging by some harsh reactions online, having a truly fun song is not appreciated anymore. This is, in my mind, a highly underrated act – it's a qualifier, it's a top 10. 'Marry me' is not something to analyse in terms of lyrics; it's a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek tale of female desperation to marry – an aural take on what the likes of Bridget Jones and countless 'wedding dress' movies have given us for decades, and echoed in girl schools across the world. It's not serious, it's utter fun, and with the excellent vocals and presentation already on show from Krista from day one, I expect it to strike a chord with the same young ones that already send Katy Perry and Gwen Stefani to the top of the charts.

Your Notes

France



At a Glance

Song: L'enfer Et Moi
Artist: Amandine Bourgeois
Composer: David Salkin
Lyricist: Boris Bergman
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

In 2008, Amandine wins "*La Nouvelle Star*" (French Pop Idol). The audience instantly fell under the spell of her warm and hoarse voice, both powerful and fragile at once.

In 2009, her debut album *20m²* is certified Gold. For her second album *Sans Amour Mon Amour* in 2012 she records in the famous Abbey Road studios in London, with Amy Winehouse and Plan B's staff.

<http://www.facebook.com/manidnote>

France in Eurovision

Appearances: 56
Debut: 1956
Victory: 5

- 1958: Dors mon Amour by Andre Cleaveau, with 27 points
- 1960: Tom Pillibi by Jacqueline Boyer, with 32 points
- 1962: Un Premier Amour by Isabelle Aubret, with 26 points
- 1969: Un Jour Un Enfant by Frida Boccara, with 18 points
- 1977: L'oiseau et l'enfant by Marie Myriam, with 136 points

Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2012: Echo (You and I), by Anggun, 22nd with 21 points
2011: Sognu, by Amaury Vassili, 15th with 82 points
2010: Allez Ola Ole by Jessy Matador, 12th with 82 points

2013 National Final

The French entry was selected through an internal selection, organised by the French broadcaster. On 22 January 2013, it was revealed that France Télévisions had been conducting a private selection among 18 short-listed songs that were presented to an expert committee. The song "L'enfer et moi" was première on 13 March 2013 through release on Spotify.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Even if you didn't know the country, within a few bars you can tell this is the French entry. Sounding exactly like a smoky Parisian speakeasy, this is as close to 'traditional' as you would expect. Which also means it's quite a harsh sound, with an staccato attack urging the song forward. This is probably more a song for the jury to vote for than the audience at home due to the aggressive nature both of the song and the passion that Bourgois attacks the lyrics and emotion, so a mid table result is about the best that France can hope for, but I'm expecting a powerful three minutes.

Sharleen says...

If Finland gives us the jolly desperate take of the female relationship psyche mirrored by Bridget Jones, France most certainly gives us the sinister version of that which should form the main soundtrack of 50 Shades of Gray. And whilst I don't advocate that piece of trash which millions of women happily devoured in book form, I wholeheartedly adore the evil and haunting tones emanating from Amandine. This proved the surprise package of the Amsterdam live concerts in April, and was such a confident performance few could deny she brought life to the song which previously passed under the fan radar. But I worry what we shall see on stage in Malmo – France have a tendency to over-perform, and it would kill any atmosphere that the song needs to pull off a good result. Unfortunately for that reason, I predict a mid-table result at best.

Your Notes

Georgia



At a Glance

Song: Waterfall
Artist: Nodi Tatishvili & Sophie Gelovani
Composer: Thomas G:son & Erik Bernholm
Lyricist: Thomas G:son
Performing: Semi 2, 15th

About the Artist

Sophie Gelovani was born on March 21st, 1984. She studied piano at the Musical School. In 2005, she graduated from the Ilia Chavchavadze State University, Faculty of International Relations, and afterwards she studied at the Musical School named after Zakaria Paliashvili. Today she is a teacher in the Musical School named after Iakob Gogebashvili.

Her first TV success was her victory in the talent show *Morning Star* in 1999. and she continued to win prizes, including the first place at the international musical contest *Do-Re-Mi* in Armenia in 2000 and the Grand Prix of the *Songs of the World* contest, Moldova in 2006.

In 2007, Sophie won the Grand Prix at the *Vesna Romansa* festival in Saint Petersburg as well as the first place at the *Moscow International Contest*. Most recently, she has participated in the TV project *10+10* in 2011/12.

Nodi Tatishvili was born on November 5th, 1986. He graduated from Tbilisi Musical School and Georgia's Technical University, faculty of Public Administration. In 2011, he graduated from the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance at Burlington School in London.

He has taken part in many international musical contests, including the *International Music Festival* and *The Amber Star* in Lithuania, *Astana 2007* in Kazakhstan, *World Star Quest*, *Slaviansky Bazar* in Belarus, and *Golden Voices* in Moldova. Apart from that, he is the winner of the *Geostar* talent show in 2009. In 2011, his debut album was released under the title *I Am Georgian*. His first solo concert was held at the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall in 2011.

<http://www.facebook.com/EurovisionGeorgia>

Georgia in Eurovision

Appearances: 6
Debut: 2007
Victory: -
Best: 9th
- 2011: One More Day by Eldrine, with 110 points
- 2010: Shine by Sopho Nizharadze, with 136 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011

Recent History

2012: I'm a Joker by Anri Jokhadze, 14th in the semi with 36 points

2011: One More Day by Eldrine, 9th with 110 points

2010: Shine by Sopho Nizharadze, 9th with 136 points

2013 National Final

On 31 December 2012, GPB announced that [Sopho Gelovani](#) and [Nodiko Tatishvili](#) would represent Georgia in the 2013 Eurovision Song Contest. On 27 February during GPB's morning program "Our Morning", Sopho Gelovani and Nodiko Tatishvili presented "Waterfall" to the public.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Guess who forgot to get the memo that everyone was going for more a nationalistic sound this year? Instead, Georgia did what any competitive team would do when they're behind... they go and hire the best players from the opposition. Which means we all get to write G:orgia as Thomas G:Son is behind 'Waterfall'. Coupling a typically Eurovision power ballad with an older couple who know how to belt out the emotion with screeching is a fantastic play. I'm expecting the Caucus state to waltz into the finals, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if G:Son does the double with back to back victories (and if he does, how upset will Christer Bjorkman be?)

Sharleen says...

Listening to this song, not thinking about the baggage attached to it, I am immediately reminded of two other songs – Spain 2012, and Denmark 2010. Not surprisingly, all three of these are the work of Thomas G:son (also responsible for 'Euphoria' last year); so I guess you could say what Georgia is giving us is very much a Eurovision-by-numbers tune. But is that a bad thing to be generic? With a top 4 and a top 10 result (and a winner), perhaps in the originality stakes, but I don't think it is for a result. Nodi and Sophi bring more soul and emotion than what Ell and Nikki gave when 'Running Scared' won for Azerbaijan in 2011, and with another likely tight competition and the expected firework waterfall in action at the key moment, I don't think it's hard to call that this is a real contender for the 2013 title.

Your Notes

Germany



At a Glance

Song: Glorious
Artist: Cascada
Composer: Yann Peifer, Manuel Reuter, Andres Ballinas,
Tony Cornelissen
Lyricist: Yann Peifer, Manuel Reuter, Andres Ballinas,
Tony Cornelissen
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Front-singer Natalie Horler and her team of producers and writers Yann Peifer (Yanou) and Manuel Reuter (Manian) have topped charts in more than 20 countries with their irresistible dance-pop songs. Collecting numerous awards (e.g. the World Music Award in 2007) throughout their career, they have established themselves as one of the top European dance floor acts of the present. Bonn-based Natalie grew up in Germany.

In 2004, through her studio work, she met Cologne-based producers Yann Peifer (Yanou) and Manuel Reuter (Manian) who invited her to front their new project, Cascada. Within 18 months, together they found international fame with their huge debut hit *Everytime We Touch*. The success of the album gained the World Music Award in the category World's Best-Selling German Artist. Their productions now make weekly appearances in the European charts, and the second major Cascada hit *Evacuate The Dancefloor*, made the top ten worldwide and reached number one in the official UK charts.

<http://www.facebook.com/cascadamusic>

Germany in Eurovision

Appearances: 57
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1982: Ein Bisschen Frieden by Nicole, with 161 points
- 2010: Satellite by Lena Meyer-Landrut, with 246 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2012: Standing Still, by Roman Lob, 8th with 110 points
2011: Taken by a Stranger, by Lena Meyer-Landrut, 10th with 107 points
2010: Satellite by Lena Meyer-Landrut, 1st with 246 points

2013 National Final

On 23 November 2012, NDR announced that the German national final would take place at the TUI Arena in Hanover on 14 February 2013. Twelve acts were selected to participate in the final put forward by a selection of record companies. The selection was made by a seven-member expert jury consisting of representatives of NDR, Brainpool and major record labels. After the combination of radio voting, jury voting and televote/SMS voting, Cascada were the winners with the song "Glorious". It won with 30 points, 7 points ahead of second place result La BrassBanda.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Now this is how you do Eurodance. Look at the construction of the song, and how it constantly teases with the expectations of the listener. The three choruses raise the intensity but hold back just enough to make you want to listen to the next part. It twists and turns around the central motif, letting you know there will be a reward in the music, but you'll need to work the dance floor to receive it. And Horler knows how to sell the song on stage through the singing and choreograph. Its clear that the performers, the songwriters, and the lyricists have been in this genre a long time. If I had to mark out a favourite for the win, it would be Germany.

Sharleen says...

On first impression, audio-only, I wrote this off as just another generic dance tune. And I won't deny that 'Glorious' as a song certainly does fit that description. What convinced me of its worth was the live performance given at the German National Final – leaving me with a wow impact due to Natalies' stunning vocal and the confident delivery of a genre which typically is poorly delivered at Eurovision. It felt like a winner on the night, and re-watching the live show, I am still convinced it could be on 18 May. This is bound to perform better than expected, and I foresee another top 10 (at the least) for Germany.

Your Notes

Greece



At a Glance

Song: Alcohol is Free
Artist: Koza Mostra feat.
Agathon Iakovidis
Composer: Ilias Kozas
Lyricist: Stathis Pachidis, Ilias Kozas
Performing: Semi 2, 9th

About the Artist

Ilias Kozas was the lead singer of the band Cabaret Balkan, one of the best Greek Balkan Bands, in their most creative period. Kozas had a restless mind with many significant collaborations, and he sought a more personal way of expressing himself. He realised his goal by forming the band Koza Mostra, which became one of the most famous Balkan, ska bands in Greece. The band also features Christos Kalaitzopoulos: Accordion, Vassilis Nalbantis: Trumpet, Alex Archontis: Drums, and Stelios Siomos: Guitar.

Agathon Iakovidis is devoted to rebetiko music, loyally serving it since 1973, refusing to sing any other – even more popular- styles. He is a keen collector of vinyl records of rare rebetiko recordings. In 1977, Iakovidis created the Rebetiko band of Thessaloniki and he released two records. In 1981 he moved to Athens, where he worked with famous musicians such as: Kostas Papadopoulos, George Koros, Vassilis Soukas, Lazaros Koulaxidis, Nikos Filippidis, Nikos Chatzopoulos and many others. He has toured all around Greece, Europe and USA.

<http://www.facebook.com/ilievskivlatko#!/pages/Loucas-Yiorkas/36080223637>

Greece in Eurovision

Appearances: 34
Debut: 1974
Victory: 1
- 2005: My Number One by Elena Paparizou, with 230 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2012

Recent History

2012: Aphrodisiac, by Eleftheria Eleftheriou, 17th with 64 points
2011: Watch my Dance, by Loucas Yiorkas feat. Stereo Mike, 7th with 120 points
2010: Opa by Giorgos Alkaios, 8th with 140 points

2013 National Final

The Greek national broadcaster Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), announced on 15 January 2013 that it had reached an agreement with private music channel MAD TV to take on the organization and production of a national final to select a song to represent Greece in the contest. A national final was held on 18 February 2013, with 4 artists from Panik Records. With 50/50 televote and jury, Koza Mostra & Agathonas Iakovidis won with a total of 36.72% of the vote.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

How bouncy does this song make me? Immensely bouncy, that's how much. An infectious stage routine, some ethnic sounds, kilts, a nicely repetitive chorus, and a guest appearance from Super Mario on the tiny guitar makes this just the tonic a currency-ravaged southern Europe needs. And every bar-tab opened in Malmo will remind us that the alcohol isn't actually free.

Sharleen says...

Never underestimate the power of a good Greek song. No-one rated 'Watch My Dance' in 2011, and where did that end up? I can see the appeal in this one though – its infectious ska sound should energise the crowd forced to stand through a 2 hour show top-heavy with slow tempo numbers. That energy coupled with the bouncy stage performance and a wonderfully memorable catch-cry of 'Alcohol is Free' is going to be hard to forget come voting time. There is no question it's a qualifier, but just how far could it make a dent in the top 15 at the final?

Your Notes

Hungary



HU2013

At a Glance

Song: Kedvesem
Artist: ByeAlex
Composer: Alex Márta, Zoltán Palásti Kovács
Lyricist: Alex Márta
Performing: Semi 2, 12th

About the Artist

Alex Márta, alias ByeAlex, is a 29 years old guy from a small town called Fényeslitke in the Eastern part of Hungary. Alex made first attempts to write songs when he was a teenager. When he finished high-school, he formed a band called Love Story Bar, which did not get too far though. His first success as musician came after his university graduation: his first single *Csókolom!* was regularly played by national music channels, followed by his next singles *Láttamoztam* and *Messziről* which was a joint composition with radio listeners.

<http://www.facebook.com/byealexmusic>

Hungary in Eurovision

Appearances: 11
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 4th
- 1994: Kinek mondjам el vétkeimet? by Frederika Bayer, with 122 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2007, 2011, 2012

Recent History

2012: Sound of our Hearts, by Compact Disco, 24th with 19 points
2011: What About My Dreams?, by Kati Wolf, 22nd with 53 points
2010: -

2013 National Final

The Hungarian entry was selected through a national selection format titled again "A Dal" (which means "The Song"), consisting of three heats, two semi-finals and a final, organised by the Hungarian broadcaster . On 10 January 2013, during a press conference held by MTVA, out of a total of 244 submissions, a jury committee chose 30 songs to proceed to the next stage of the competition. Four songs from each semifinal, eight songs in total, qualified to compete. In the first round, the jury selected the top four songs which proceeded to the second round of voting. Instead of assigning scores immediately after each performance, the jury announced their vote after all of the songs were performed. A different voting system for the jury was used, assigning 4 points to the song they placed fourth, 6 points to the song they placed third, 8 points to the song they placed second and 10 points to the song they placed first. Kedvesem ranked 4th, 30 points below first place. A public SMS vote exclusively decided the result in the second round. ByeAlex and the song "Kedvesem" was the winner.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Take a perfectly good language, throw out all the vowels, put in some extra 'chh' and 'hgh' sounds, and pair it with a light and floaty backing track. That's Kevedem for you. If you can think of the voice as a musical instrument, rather than the part that tells a story, this is a song packed with emotion - and ByeAlex can get more emotion out of the song singing in his native language. But I think the audiences around Europe would rather know the story and be looking for an explanation behind the words, which is a shame.

Sharleen says...

I love this. But my opinion of the song is purely wearing my indie-pop-loving beanie on, not my Eurovision one. It's tender, the emotion of ByeAlex transcends the language barrier, and frankly, I wish he was singing it to me. It's a beautiful grower and I never expected it to take off in the fan circles as it has. I don't think it has the power to escape the semi, but if it's any consolation I think it could have a life beyond the contest on many an iPod and Spotify account.

Your Notes

Iceland



At a Glance

Song: Eg A Lif
Artist: Eythor Ingi
Composer: Örlygur Smári & Pétur Örn Gudmundsson
Lyricist: Örlygur Smári & Pétur Örn Gudmundsson
Performing: Semi 2, 8th

About the Artist

Eypór Ingi Gunnlaugsson was born on May 29th 1989 in Dalvík, a small fishing town of approximately 1,400 inhabitants in northern Iceland. In 2004, at the age of fifteen, he won a part in the Icelandic version of the musical *Oliver!*, which turned out to be one of the most successful theatrical works ever staged in Akureyri, the capital of northern Iceland. This was only the beginning of his theatrical career as he was offered a part in *Óvitar* in 2007 as well as taking the leading role in a college staging of the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Eypór Ingi won the College Song Contest in the spring of 2007 and was selected to compete as a contestant in TV talent show '*Bandið hans Bubba*'. After winning the show in early 2008 he soon began working as a professional singer, musician and sound technician.

Eypór Ingi founded the progressive rock group Eldberg and in 2010 joined the renowned Icelandic band Todmobile. In 2011 Eypór Ingi was nominated as best singer in the Gríman Theatrical Awards for his role as Riff Raff in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The following year he played hippie leader Berger in the musical Hair. He also featured in the cast of *Les Misérables* as law student Marius Pontmercy, when the musical was staged in Þjóðleikhúsið, the National Theatre of Iceland, in 2011-2012.

<http://www.facebook.com/Eythoringimusic>

Iceland in Eurovision

Appearances: 26
Debut: 1986
Victory: -
Best: 2nd
- 1999: All Out of Luck by Selma, with 146 points
- 2009: Is It True? by Yohanna, with 218 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2008-2012

Recent History

2012: Never Forget, by Greta Salóme & Jónsi, 20th with 46 points
2011: Coming Home, by Sjonnis Friends, 20th with 61 points
2010: Je Na Sai Quoi by Hera Björk, 19th with 41 points

2013 National Final

On 12 November 2012, RÚV revealed the 12 songs that would compete over 2 semis and final to select the Eurovision entry. Three songs were chosen to qualify directly during each semi final night by combination of the televoting public and a professional jury (50/50) and the jury chose one wild card song to compete in the final. During the final, the two songs with the highest score from a joint combined vote of televotes and jury votes were selected on the night to compete again for the winning position. No results were announced outside of the winning song Eg a Lif.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Eg a Lif is a very simple song. It has a chorus that you can sing along to, even if you don't know a word of Icelandic, and along with San Marino this is a song that really needed to stay in its native language to be a success. There is a mythic edge to this song, which is helped by Eyfor's almost operatic performance. It's not quite at the levels of last year's Kuula from Estonia, but it's the one to watch out of all the male soloists this year.

Sharleen says...

There are few languages which lend themselves so well to a ballad – for me its' between Icelandic, Estonian, and at a push, Hungarian. The language may transcend barriers, but it needs to be coupled with a real emotion to leave an indelible impression. Ott was a master of this in 2012 (also helped by his good looks), but I can't connect in that way with Eythor. 'Eg A Lif' is a lovely, lilting celtic lullaby, but it leaves me feeling empty at the end. There is little doubt it will be performed well vocally, however this won't threaten anyone for a qualification unless its can communicate across the screen.

Your Notes

Ireland



At a Glance

Song: Only Love Survives
Artist: Ryan Dolan
Composer: Wez Devine, Ryan Dolan
Lyricist: Wez Devine, Ryan Dolan
Performing: Semi 1, 13th

About the Artist

Ryan Dolan is a young singer-songwriter from Strabane in Co. Tyrone. He has played support to many acts over the years including Tinchy Stryder, Jedward and many more. Dolan has been described as one of the most exciting homegrown musical talents to be discovered in Ireland in recent years. His YouTube channel has received over 800,000 hits.

<http://www.facebook.com/ryandolansmusc>

Ireland in Eurovision

Appearances: 47
Debut: 1965
Victory: 7
- 1970: All Kinds of Everything by Dana, with 32 points
- 1980: Whats Another Year? by Johnny Logan, with 143 points
- 1987: Hold Me Now by Johnny Logan, with 172 points
- 1992: Why Me? by Linda Martin, with 155 points
- 1993: In Your Eyes by Niamh Kavanagh, with 187 points
- 1994: Rock n Roll Kids by Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan, with 226 points
- 1996: The Voice by Eimear Quinn, with 162 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2006, 2010-2012

Recent History

2012: Waterline, by Jedward, 19th with 46 points
2011: Lipstick, by Jedward, 8th with 119 points
2010: It's For You by Niamh Kavanagh, 23rd with 25 points

2013 National Final

In October 2012, RTÉ confirmed that Ireland's song and performer will again be chosen by the Eurosong mentor process, first used in 2011. The mentors were each tasked with selecting a song and an act to perform it, with the five entries announced by RTÉ on 6 February 2013. The five songs were debuted on the RTÉ Radio 1 programme *Mooney* on 7 February.

The winning song was decided on *The Late Late Show Eurosong 2013* on 22 February. The five songs were performed live, with the winner determined by a combination of public televote and regional jury vote. Ryan won the contest with just a margin of 8 points.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Picking up the pieces after the double trouble of the Grimes twins is Ryan Dolan. This is what we expect from Ireland at Eurovision, some traditional instruments, a hint of Riverdance, and something we can take to the dance floor. It's perhaps not modern enough to win the Contest, but there's enough here to get through the semi finals successfully, especially as semi-final one will have far proportionally more 'hardcore' Eurovision fans watching who'll be ready to vote for something comfortable like Mr Dolan.

Sharleen says...

This song clearly had a checklist when it was selected. Does it have an celtic instrument? Yep. Riverdancing? Tick. Cute guy? Nod. A good dancebeat? Yes indeed. I'm glad Ireland is taking a rest from sending Jedward for a third time and delivering a good singer instead of a novelty. It's going to appeal to a televoting public in a big way by having all those elements listed above, and the confidence of Dolan on stage should make sure the jury is swayed as well. Whilst not setting the Malmo dancefloors alight, it is a qualifier, and should place somewhere between those results of the Grime Brothers in 2011 and 2012.

Your Notes

Israel



At a Glance

Song: Rak Bishvilo
Artist: Moran Mazor
Composer: Han Harari
Lyricist: Gal Sarig
Performing: Semi 2, 10th

About the Artist

Moran Mazor, is 21 years old from Holon a suburb next to Tel Aviv Israel. At the age of 17 she was accepted to the military band of the Air Force. After a full year at the military service she went for auditions for the first season of the program "*Eyal Golan is calling you*" a reality TV show that discovers talents, and won first place. She has just finished working on her first album along with Eyal Golan, and accompanied him on a special tour across Israel singing original songs.

<http://www.facebook.com/MoranMazorOfficial>

Israel in Eurovision

Appearances: 36
Debut: 1973
Victory: 3
- 1978: A-Ba-Ni-Bi by Izhar Cohen and Alphabeta, with 157 points
- 1979: Hallelujah by Milk and Honey, with 125 points
- 1998: Diva by Dana International, with 172 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010

Recent History

2012: Time, by Izabo, 13th in the semi with 33 points
2011: Ding Dong, by Dana International, 15th in the semi with 35 points
2010: Milim by Harel Skaat, 14th with 71 points

2013 National Final

In August 2012, IBA announced that a new format would be implemented for their national final, which includes three semifinals, a second chance round and a final with 10 songs. Three semifinal with 10 songs in each were scheduled to take place on 26, 27 and 28 February 2013, with the top three songs qualifying to the final and the fourth placed song qualifying to the second chance round on 3 March 2013. Nine qualifiers from the semifinals and an additional qualifier from the second chance round would complete the 10 song line-up for the final on 7 March 2013. On 29 January 2013, IBA disclosed the 30 songs that were selected by a special committee of artists, singers, composers, musicians, producers and experts from the music industry. Moran Mazor won as the top favourite of both 50/50 jury and televote, 9 points ahead of second place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The Big Bang Theory called, they want Bernadette back. Moran Mazar has an incredibly traditional sounding Israeli song, with enough power ballad sensibilities that will make it sound comfortable on the night. The issue might be the hard consonants on show by singing in hebrew, making this song a bit 'rougher' than Hungary. It's not a beautiful language to sing in, but the veteran Eurovision fan in me is glad they are staying with their own culture. And if nothing else works out, Israel can be guaranteed a nomination for the Barbara Dex award.

Sharleen says...

In every discussion surrounding the song, I have yet to hear anyone talk about Morans' flawless scaling vocals, the romanticism of the song, or the heartfelt lyrics. Its always about her styling. I won't pass such judgements, but I think if that's all this song can muster in terms of comment and viewpoint, as it is a SONG contest, then perhaps it won't be qualifying.

Your Notes

Italy



At a Glance

Song: L'Essenziale
Artist: Marco Mengoni
Composer: Francesco De Benedittis, Roberto Casalino,
Marco Mengoni
Lyricist: Roberto Casalino
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Marco was born on Christmas Day 1988 in Ronciglione (Viterbo, Italy).

After seven years of musical formation which includes not only singing but also working as a sound technician, Marco wins the third series of *X Factor* in 2009 and his first EP *Dove Si Vola* becomes his first success. Only months later he participated in the 60th edition of Sanremo with the song *Credimi Ancora* and finishes third.

After a successful tour launch Marco wins the TRL Award in the category "Man of the Year", the Wind Music Awards and his debut releases are certified Platinum. He then releases the *Re Matto live* album hitting #1 in Italy. In November 2010 Marco Mengoni wins the "Best Italian Act" Award at the *MTV European Music Awards* and he also gets the "Best European Act", as the first Italian in 17 editions to win the award.

In September 2011 he releases a new single *Solo* and the concept album *Solo 2.0*. The *Solo Tour* previews in Milan and Rome are both sold-out. In 2012 he embarks on a theatre tour created by Marco Mengoni, Elisa and Andrea Rigonat. Marco is also the special guest of the event "Premio Leggio d'Oro", where he gets an award for his dubbing of Onceler, a cartoon character from the movie *The Lorax*. Earlier this year Marco won the 63rd Sanremo Music Festival with his song *L'Essenziale*.

<http://www.facebook.com/marcomengoniofficial>

Italy in Eurovision

Appearances: 39
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1964: Non ho l'età by Gigliola Cinquetti, with 49 points
- 1990: Insieme: 1992 by Toto Cutugno, with 149 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2012: L'Amore È Femmina (Out Of Love), by Nina Zilli, 9th with 101 points
2011: Madness of Love, by Raphael Gualazzi, 2nd with 189 points
2010: -

2013 National Final

Selection took place via the San Remo song festival in Italy on 16th February, with the jury making a special selection from the artists attending. The San Remo winner and their winning song was selected to represent Italy.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It won San Remo, and San Remo is more than 'just' a National Final. So for everyone who's wondering what Italy are up to, I'm not one of them. Many of us underestimated Raphael Gualazzi's 'Reality and Fantasy,' which went on to prove just how successful a well sung song could do at Eurovision. That's not going to happen again. Mengoni has stage presence, a fantastic voice, and knows how to win. Another Top Ten for Italy is definitely on the cards, and I suspect RAI should get a provisional booking at the Torino Palasport Olimpico for 2014.

Sharleen says...

Echoing Ewan's thoughts - Mengoni has stage presence, a fantastic voice, and knows how to win. Looking across Europe, L'Essenziale goes into the contest as the song with most current public recognition, coming from a win at San Remo and played across the continent beyond just its diaspora. My bets have already been laid. This is the dark horse for 2013.

Your Notes

Latvia



At a Glance

Song: Here We Go
Artist: PeR
Composer: Ralfs Eilands, Arturas Burke
Lyricist: Ralfs Eilands
Performing: Semi 2, 1st

About the Artist

PeR which stands for Please explain the Rhythm is a Latvian beatbox and vocal band formed by two singers and beatboxers from Latvia (Edmunds and Ralph). Starting from 2007 PeR have performed in all of the biggest Latvian TV shows. These two musicians have already participated in the Latvian Latvian finals of 2009, 2010 and 2012.

Both of the biggest Latvian festivals - the Baltic Beach Party and Positivus have shared their stages with PeR in 2009.

In the summer of 2010 beatbox band PeR was one of the many contestants in festival New Wave, but before that they visited Estonia to perform in the Reiu Rock festival.

2011 was successful for PeR not only in Lithuania, their single *Go Get Up* peaked no. 2 in Denmark's Chart Base TOP 100 and PeR were also nominated in this independent music chart as 'Best New Artists' and the video of the song was nominated in the category of 'Best European Alternative Video' and they won in both categories

In the end of 2012 PeR released their self-titled debut album which was nominated as the 'Album of the Year' in Latvia.

<http://www.facebook.com/PeRmusic>

Latvia in Eurovision

Appearances: 14
Debut: 2000
Victory: 1
- 2002: I Wanna by Marie N, with 176 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005-2008

Recent History

2012: Beautiful Song, by Anmary, 16th in the semi with 17 points

2011: Angel in Disguise, by Musiqq, 17th in the semi with 25 points,

2010: What For? by Aisha, 17th in the semi with 11 points

2013 National Final

On 19 October 2012, LTV officially announced their selection. Both national and international composers were invited to submit songs, however the competing artists had to have Latvian citizenship. The format for the selection consisted of two 12 song semifinals held on 8 and 9 February 2013, with the final on 16 February 2013. The final of Dziesma 2013 took place at the Juras Varti Theatre House in Ventspils. Six qualifiers from each semifinal completed the 12 song line-up for the final where a 50/50 mix of public televoting and a nine member jury selected Marta Ritova, Samanta Tina, and PeR (with "Here We Go") as the three super finalists in the first round of voting. In the second round of voting, the group PeR with the song "Here We Go" won Dziesma 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

PeR nearly finished last in the Latvian National Final. They also came first, as the cheeky little so-and-sos entered two songs. Unfortunately white eastern european rappers aren't going to make a good impression on the watching public, and the juries are more likely to tend towards Montenegro as the leaders of this genre. Still, they have a fantastic trumpet riff that should make for a good 24 hour loop on YouTube, which is ironic given their failed NF song was 'Sad Trumpet'.

Sharleen says...

The positive: this will open semi final 2 with a bang and mobilize the dancefloor and give the contest much needed energy. The negative: It will still result in another year of Latvia heading home early. This song makes me wanna bounce and sing, but it feels like such a throwaway nonsense piece, the likes which UK will pop on its clip shows in future years to poke fun of. And I can't beyond the thinking that Latvia has better songs to choose from, but the campaign to vote for a Latvian-penned song (over the 2nd favourite by international writers) pushed over the line moreso than the quality of the tune.

Your Notes

Lithuania



At a Glance

Song: Something
Artist: Andrius Pojavis
Composer: Andrius Pojavis
Lyricist: Andrius Pojavis
Performing: Semi 1, 10th

About the Artist

Born in Jurbarkas, Lithuania, in 1983 he started singing at the age of five. His first band at school was called "No Hero". After moving to Vilnius he played with some other bands. With one of them, The Hetero, won EuroRock 2006. He started his career as a songwriter in Ireland where he lived for one year. His first single *Traukiniai* (*Trains*) arrived in a good position in the Lithuanian Top 20.

<http://www.facebook.com/lrt.lt>

Lithuania in Eurovision

Appearances: 14
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 6th
-2006: We Are the Winners by LT United, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012

Recent History

2012: Love is Blind, by Donny Montell, 14th with 70 points
2011: C'est Ma Vie, by Evelina Sašenko, 19th with 63 points
2010: East European Funk by InCulto, 12th in semi with 44 points

2013 National Final

On 12 September 2012, LRT released the rules for their selection procedure, which outlined a selection that would consist of heats, semi-finals and a final. Artists and composers must be Lithuanian, with songs submitted by 1 October 2012. LRT opted to include two introduction shows where the selected artists performed a song of their choice and establish their candidacy to represent Lithuania. The heats began on 3 November, followed by the semi-finals on 8 December and the final 20 December 2012. Despite coming 3rd in his heat, 4th in the semi final, and then equal first (1st with the jury, 2nd with the public vote) neck and neck with Gerai Gerai and Miss Sheep, Andrius won the superfinal to represent Lithuania.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Andrius Pojavis peaked at just the right time in the Lithuania finals. He didn't win his heat, he sneaked through the semi-final on a count-back, and only topped the table when it actually counted. Now the scores are zeroed again can he manage the same trick in Malmo? Probably not, he's lacking stage presence, and even with a more intimate venue I'm marking 'Something' down as the song that's going to look lost on the stage.

Sharleen says...

This song never seems to get the combo right – it started life as a rock song, but had poor Andrius dressed as a tenor, and when the stylist came onboard to give his look more edge, they pared back the tune into a middle-of-the-road pop tune. Couple this styling issue with the fact that his eyebrows need their own show so detract from what is actually a very good song, and the emotions displayed don't match the lyrics, 'Something' falls in a heap. I honestly wish it wasn't so messed up, because I do love an underdog and Lithuania were starting to build quite a good track record. Unfortunately this is going nowhere, and I hope Andrius comes back in a few years after he has some lessons in how to act and stage.

Your Notes

Malta



At a Glance

Song: Tomorrow
Artist: Gianluca
Composer: Boris Cezek & Dean Muscat
Lyricist: Boris Cezek & Dean Muscat
Performing: Semi 2, 6th

About the Artist

Gianluca is the front man of a local band, whose dynamic performances and recent single releases have propelled it to the forefront of the island's music scene. While funk and indie elements characterise the band's distinctive sound, Bezzina draws on a wider variety of influences as a solo artist. He is mostly inspired by Michael Bubé's brassy standards, John Mayer's modern blues, the nu-folk style of Mumford and Sons and Noah and the Whale, while also being deeply captivated by Chris Tomlin's contemporary Christian music.

Gianluca is a regular singer with his prayer group and has also spent time doing voluntary work among children in Turin, Cairo and Palermo, with the sisters of Mother Theresa. He started off his music career by playing the piano accordion, eventually shifting his focus to singing in various charity concerts around Malta, including the popular biannual Voices concerts and Rockestra, a yearly event organised by the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra and held under the Patronage of the President of Malta.

It was through one of these charity events that songwriters Boris Cezek and Dean Muscat approached Gianluca with the intention of collaborating.

<http://www.facebook.com/gianlucabezzina1>

Malta in Eurovision

Appearances: 26
Debut: 1971
Victory: -
Best: 2nd
- 2002: 7th Wonder by Ira Losco, with 164 points
- 2005: Angel by Chiara, with 192 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012

Recent History

2012: This is the Night, by Kurt Calleja, 21st with 41 points

2011: One Life, by Glen Vella, 11th in the semi

2010: My Dream by Thea Garrett, 12th in the semi with 45 points

2013 National Final

A semifinal took place on 1 February 2013 at the Malta Fairs & Conventions Centre in Ta' Qali, where 16 of the 24 entries qualified to compete in the final. Seven members of the jury awarded their points from 1-8, 10, and 12 points. The jury vote accounted for 7/8 of the result with the televote accounting for the remaining 1/8. With an overwhelming jury vote and despite coming second to Kevin Borg in the televote, Gianluca won the Maltese selection with 92 points – 12 ahead of 2nd place.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Sometimes all you need is a simple song, sung well, with a care-free singer that just enjoys performing. Malta's Gianluca is nothing like Kurt Callejah last year, but the tinkly tale of Jeremy from IT is going to charm the socks off everyone. It's not winning any polls, it's not in anyone's picks to win, but it wouldn't be the first time a simple song has suddenly popped up on the night to win. Which leads me to one question for Dr Malta... can he sing 'Fly On The Wings Of Love'?

Sharleen says...

Well isn't this nice? You can't hate it, but I certainly don't feel encouraged enough to vote for such a song either. Charm with close-up and personal staging will be a big factor for how this simple ditty will go. Gianluca has an infectious smile, and if the audience listen hard enough to get the story behind the lyrics of good ol' Jeremy, it may stand a chance of qualification. But this won't be threatening the top 20 on Saturday.

Your Notes

Moldova



At a Glance

Song: O Mie
Artist: Aliona Moon
Composer: Pasha Parfeny
Lyricist: Yuliana Scutaru
Performing: Semi 1, 12th

About the Artist

Aliona Munteanu was born on the 25th of May 1989 in Chisinau. Since her childhood Aliona was a member of lots of artistic collectives, where she performed both music and dances. As their member, Aliona participated at different contests in Hungary, Belarus, France, Romania, Bulgaria and of course in her motherland Moldova.

Later she was involved in the talent show *Fabrica de Staruri 2* (Star Factory) where she gained the third place and the title of the public's favourite. With two of her ex-colleagues from Star Factory Aliona formed the pop band Thumbs Up. The band existed for two years until the break-up in 2011. After that, Aliona took some trophies at international musical festivals as a solo artist, most notably at the "Martisor Dorohoian" and "Dan Spataru" festivals, which were held in Romania.

<http://www.facebook.com/moonaliona>

Moldova in Eurovision

Appearances: 9
Debut: 2005
Victory: -
Best: 6th
- 2005: Boonika Bate Doba by Zdob si Zdub, with 148 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009-2012

Recent History

2012: Lautar, by Pasha Parfeny, 11th with 81 points

2011: So Lucky, by Zdob si Zdub, 12th with 97 points

2010: Run Away by Sunstroke Project and Olia Tira, 22nd with 27 points

2013 National Final

On 13 December 2012, TRM officially launched the selection procedure for their national final O Melodie Pentru Europa. The candidature of artists and the submission of songs were conducted as two separate selections that were ultimately intended to match the artists to the best songs. In addition, the songs were required to be in either Romanian or English and foreign songwriters were welcome to submit songs as well. On 11 January 2013, it was announced that TRM had received a total of 126 songs and that 49 artists has applied for the selection. On 17 January 2013, it was announced 60 songs and 24 artists qualified to the next round of the selection where the artists were matched with songs.

Semi finals were held on 12 and 14 March, with the final on 16 March. In each semi final, 7 artists qualified to the final, and the results were determined by 50/50 jury and televote mix. Despite being the second favourite in the televote, the jury awarded the prize to Aliona, giving her a win of 22 points, 2 ahead of the second placed song Runaways.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Aliona Moon knows the circus, as she was one of Pasha Parfeny's backing singers last year. She's even got Parfeny back on board as the writer of her Eurovision song. Unfortunately all the fun and energy that was on show last year has not made the jump from Baku to Malmo, leaving Moon with a ballad that's too slow to enjoy, but too fast to stir the emotion. It's not a painful three minutes, but it's rather forgettable.

Sharleen says...

Moldova are the kings of the party tune – Zdob si Zdub, Pasha, Sunstroke Project... The songs were memorable, the staging was lively, they were utter delights. This year, they are stepping out of their comfort zone and giving us a ballad. The key is, it's not the best ballad. At its helm we have experienced performers; Pasha Parfeny as composer and his girlfriend Aliona Moon who was his backing singer last year. I expect they both will give it a red hot go but just fall short of the mark. Forget the fact that Moldova has an excellent qualification history, it doesn't count when they aren't delivering the goods we have come to expect.

Your Notes

Montenegro



At a Glance

Song: Igranka
Artist: Who See
Composer: Djordje Miljenovic (Wikluh Sky)
Lyricist: Dejan Dedovic (Dedduh), Mario Djordjevic (Noyz),
Djordje Miljenovic (Wikluh Sky)
Performing: Semi 1, 9th

About the Artist

Who See, or Who See Klapa, is a Montenegrin hip-hop duo from the Bay of Kotor. The group members are 32 year old ,Dedduh (Dejan Dedovic), from Kotor, and 29 year old, Noyz (Mario Djordjevic), from Herceg Novi.

The group was created in early 2000s, recording their first demo track titled *Dim Po Dim (Puff After Puff)*. In 2007, the group released their debut album, "Sviranje kupcu". After two years of preparation and recording, the band released their second album *Krš i Drača* in 2012, the Who See single *Reggaeton Montenegro* conquered the charts in the Adriatic region and spent five weeks at number one of the MTV regional Top 20 chart. They were the first band from Montenegro ever to be nominated for a MTV EMA. For song *Reggaeton Montenegro*, Who See won MTV EMA award for Best Adriatic Act 2012 and MTV Video Play Award 2012 – Double Platinum. Video for the song '*Reggaeton Montenegro*' in 2012 were aired over 800 times on the MTV.

Nina Zizic started with musical career in 2003. Her first single was *Odlazi* and after this she recorded six more singles. She has participated in many music festivals in the region and won a few prizes. At 2006 she participated in Montenegro's selection for Eurovision Song Contest with the song *Potraži me*.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Who-See/>

Montenegro in Eurovision

Appearances: 5
Debut: 2007
Victory: - Best: 11th in the semi
- 2009: Just Get Out of my Life, by Andrea Demirovic, with 44 points
Semi Finals: -

Recent History

2012: Euro Neuro, by Rambo Amadeus, 15th in the semi with 20 points

2011: -

2010: -

2013 National Final

On 20 December 2012, RTCG announced that hip-hop duo Who See would represent Montenegro. On 1 February 2013, it was announced that Nina Žižić would be joining Who See as a backing vocalist and that Serbian musician Wikluh Sky would produce the song.

On 12 February, RTCG announced that Who See would perform the dubstep song "Igranka" at Eurovision. The music video, directed by Zoran Markovic - Zonja, was filmed in Podgorica and was presented in a song presentation program on 14 March 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I have only one problem with this song. The opening 'triple-beat' is identical to Ralf Mackenbach's winning song from Junior Eurovision 2009, and those few seconds present me with a disturbing vision of Mackenbach either click-clacking on stage in 5 inch heels, or taking the incredibly bassy vocals with a newly broken voice. Sending something this modern is a courageous choice by Montenegro, and it's a shame that I think many dyed-in-the-wool Eurovision fans won't give this a chance. It deserves a lot more than being in the bottom six of the first semi-final.

Sharleen says...

This is my number 1... most divisive song in the contest. You either love it or hate it, and I fall very much in the latter category. Inside or outside of the contest, this is just not the kind of song that appeals to me – I find the dub-step and rap grating, and perhaps I'm just too old and too out of the latest club scene to understand its appeal. If I am to believe my younger friends, this is a top 10 threat – and with its no.1 position on the MTV Adriatic charts and some friendly votes maybe they are right on matters of qualification; but for me judging via the filmclip, if they go to stage with a similar act, I can't see Who See going above 20th at the final.

Your Notes

Norway



NO 2013

At a Glance

Song: I Feed You My Love
Artist: Margaret Berger
Composer: Karin Park, Robin Lynch, Niklas Olovson
Lyricist: Karin Park, Robin Lynch, Niklas Olovson
Performing: Semi 2, 13th

About the Artist

In 2004, at the young age of 18, she was voted runners-up in *Norway Idol*, released her debut album *Chameleon* and was nominated for a Norwegian Grammy as best newcomer.

In 2005, Berger won the Norwegian Grammy award for the engaging and somewhat controversial video of her single *Lifetime Guarantee* and in 2006, her critically acclaimed, much loved *Pretty Scary Silver Fairy* album, did not reach the commercial heights she had hoped for. But Berger was onto something bigger and unbeknown to herself, was creating a popular “brand”, from which she is now enjoying the fruits of - through fashion projects, DJ-ing and being a unmistakable presence and name in the Norwegian underground electro scene.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Margaret-Berger>

Norway in Eurovision

Appearances: 52
Debut: 1960
Victory: 3
- 1985: La Det Swinge by Bobbysocks, with 123 points
- 1995: Nocturne by Secret Garden, with 148 points
- 2009: Fairytale by Alexander Rybak, with 387 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012

Recent History

2012: Stay, by Tooji, 26th with 7 points

2011: Haba Haba, by Stella Mwangi, 17th in the semi with 30 points

2010: My Heart is Yours by Didrik Solli-Tangen, 20th with 35 points

2013 National Final

Melodi Grand Prix began on 19th January with 3 semis of 7 entries each. 2 acts qualified directly to the final with an additional 2 acts sent to a 2nd chance round. The final 8 entries went through a process superfinal selection with 4 entries competing in the final round. With a mix of jury and televoting, it came down to Adelen and Margaret. Margaret won convincingly in the final round with double the amount of jury votes, and almost double the amount of televotes.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Take away the Inception horn and the sub-goth industrial backing track, and Margaret Berger is left on stage with a rather staid Eurovision ballad backed with poorly translated English lyrics ('I *feed* you my love'? Even the song title is as awkward as Lena trying to be all grown up). There's far too much style over substance on show here, even down to Berger's 'sexy Stormtrooper evening wear collection'.

Norway may have enthralled many Eurovision fans and pundits with this one, they were right to given Adelen another year to mature, but this is not my cup of tea. Which means it's probably a Top Five.

Sharleen says...

Unlike Ewan (who I also disagreed with on the subject of Lena in 2010/2011), I utterly get this tune. The booming industrial soundtrack and drums are hypnotic and the appearance of the ice-maiden Berger is a beautiful contrast. The main failing I see are the lyrics, but with a contest filled with bad translations, it will be overlooked as a negative. 'I Feed You My Love' is a courageous choice from Norway who gave us party tunes for the past two contests. But as with all bold decisions, you will have lovers and haters. I do think Europe wide is happy to embrace this goth-lite sound. The fan communities adore it, but judging Norway's chart response who represent more of a public-wide appeal, it failed compared to Adelen. At a best guess, it's a right hand side of the table on Saturday.

Your Notes

Romania



At a Glance

Song: Its My Life
Artist: Cezar
Composer: Cristian Faur
Lyricist: Cristian Faur
Performing: Semi 2, 17th

About the Artist

Born in 1980 in Ploiești, Romania, in a family of musicians, Cezar Oatu started studying piano when he was six and graduated the piano and choir classes at Carmen Sylva Art High school, in his native town. In 1998 he started studying canto and baroque music and soon became well-known, due to his voice, natural legerity and less common vocal limits.

In 2001 he was accepted in the Giuseppe Verdi Music Academy in Milan, and in 2004 he graduated with maximum grades on the final exam at one of the most prestigious music academies in Europe. His first pop-opera single *Cinema Paradiso* was released on Christmas Eve, in 2012. For 2013, Cezar has already planned two international duets, with Andrea Bocelli and Angela Gheorghiu, as well as a single written especially for him by the legend of electronic music, Vangelis. Presently, Cezar works at his first pop-opera album *The Voice*, dedicated to love.

<http://www.facebook.com/Cezarthevoice>

Romania in Eurovision

Appearances: 15
Debut: 1994
Victory: -
Best: 3rd
- 2005: Let Me Try by Luminița Anghel & Sistem, with 158 points
- 2010: Playing with Fire by Paula Seling & Ovi, with 162 points
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2012

Recent History

2012: Zahleilah, by Mandinga, 12th with 71 points

2011: Change, by Hotel FM, 17th with 77 points

2010: Playing with Fire, by Paula Seling and Ovi, 3rd with 162 points.

2013 National Final

On 13 January 2013, TVR released details regarding the national selection. A submission period between 14 January and 3 February was made available for all interested singers and songwriters to apply. 148 songs were submitted at the close of the deadline with entries being received from the United Kingdom, Turkey, Israel, Sweden and France in addition to Romania. A professional jury was to select the best 24-28 songs and announce them on 18 February. Instead, on 14 February, 32 semifinalists were named by TVR. The semifinalists were subsequently drawn into two semifinals held on 23 and 24 February with the qualifying entries proceeding to the final on 9 March.

Of the 16 acts in each semi, 6 proceeded to the final. The winner was determined by a 50/50 jury and televote. Despite only coming 3rd in the jury vote, Cezar won overwhelmingly with the public and gathered more than 1000 votes more than his nearest rival.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's not called the Eurovision Schlager Contest, so I'm really pleased Romania have sent something as stunning, jaw dropping, and classy as Cezar Ouat. Yes he's a countertenor, with a rather high falsetto that's going to be memorable. He's played some of the biggest European opera houses in his career, and if he wants to bring opera to the masses, he's come to the right place. Let's hope the audience take him as seriously as the jury will.

Sharleen says...

I don't think this is the mess that everyone has it down for. It certainly has a 'WTF!' element when watching, but what you are left with afterwards is a real impression of Cezars vocal talent, and a very sticky song and performance that won't leave your mind too soon. It will be viewed as a novelty in the West which hasn't hurt the televoting numbers for similar acts, and I think the judges won't be ranking it last on their lists because of the vocal range and delivery on display. It will be borderline result at semi, and may feature in the bottom 5 at final, but it keeps that Romanian qualification record intact yet another year.

Your Notes

Russia



At a Glance

Song: What If
Artist: Dina Garipova
Composer: Gabriel Alares, Joakim Björnberg, Leonid Gutkin
Lyricist: Gabriel Alares, Joakim Björnberg, Leonid Gutkin
Performing: Semi 1, 6th

About the Artist

Dina was born on March the 25th 1991 in the city of Zelenodolsk (in the Republic of Tatarstan), to a medical family. From the age of six, she took classes in singing at the Golden Microphone Theatre. Dina is a proud prizewinner of different musical contests: the Firebird Russian National Song Contest (1999), the Republican Festival "Constellation" (2001), International Contest in Estonia (2005). Dina Garipova as a member of the Golden Microphone Theatre participated in the International Contest in France where their musical won the Grand Prix. In 2010 Dina's first solo concert took place in her home city Zelenodolsk.

In 2012 Dina Garipova won the reality talent show *The Voice*. As a winner of the show, Dina received the main prize – a contract with Universal Music, one of the largest music corporations in the world.

<http://www.facebook.com/DinaGaripova.Official>

Russia in Eurovision

Appearances: 17
Debut: 1994
Victory: 1
- 2008: Believe by Dima Bilan, with 272 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2004-2012

Recent History

2012: Party for Everybody, by Buranovskiye Babushki, 2nd with 259 points
2011: Get You, by Alexej Vorobyov, 16th with 77 points
2010: Lost and Forgotten by Peter Nalitch, 11th with 90 points

2013 National Final

On 31 January 2013, C1R officially announced that they would internally select the artist and song that would represent Russia.

On 19 February, Dina Garipova and the song "What If", composed by Gabriel Alares, Joakim Björnberg and Leonid Gutkin, were selected to represent Russia.

"What If" was presented to the public on 24 February during the C1R television newscast *Vremya*.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

The russian for cynical might as well be Garipova. 'What If...' is a song that is constructed as meticulously as the running order at Melodifestivalen, with lyrics dripping in enough sugar to put you into a diabetic coma, and a performance that will fill your Eurovision Cliche Bingo Card in under thirty seconds. You can't help but like it. All together now... "In Russia, Eurovision winner picks you!"

Sharleen says...

Bravo to Russia for selecting yet another amazing vocalist in Garipova – I swear they must breed them in the East. But I just will not embrace 'What if'; it offends my sensibilities. The sacchrine song of peace feels far too contrived on first listen, even beyond the fact of which country is actually producing it. And then the filmclip tipped me over the edge – people embracing random strangers, different nationalities, different genders, different sexualities. But I guess that is the theme of this contest and it seems like Russia are running with it in at least song. If it won, I wouldn't be surprised. However I would be angry for the manipulation. I expect it to come top 10, but in my own personal opinion, it deserves a mid-table at best.

Your Notes

San Marino



At a Glance

Song: Crisalide (Vola)
Artist: Valentina Monetta
Composer: Ralph Siegel
Lyricist: Mauro Balestri
Performing: Semi 2, 2nd

About the Artist

Valentina Monetta was born on the 1st of March, 1975 in the Republic of San Marino.

Starting from 1995, she has been working with the best local musicians, becoming a versatile singer with a great talent for improvisation; her voice is both colorful and versatile, ranging from jazz to melodic Italian, from soul to R&B and pop.

Monetta's artistic versatility has allowed her to deal with varied work experience as a singer, actress and presenter, and she even composed the music and written the lyrics to her first solo album, a celebratory work of personal and professional balance, releasing the CD *Il Mio Gioco Preferito* recorded with the trio My Funky Valentine.

In 1995, Monetta started an adventure with her first band Tiberio, and soon thereafter formed the Parafunky. She was also part of the group 2Black, as well as forming the female vocal duo Harem'B. In 2002, with the project Charme, she released the single *Sharp*, and collaborated with the band Bluesmobile.

In March 2012 she worked with Fabrizio Raggi staging the show *Ma Che Differenza Fa*, a tribute to Ornella Vanoni in which Monetta shows her singing and acting talent.

In August 2012, still directed by Raggi, she was the protagonist of *Camelia*, a musical commissioned by UNICEF, in which Valentina presented her songs together with covers of some great Italian singers and songwriters. Her most recent experiences are all with her live band My Funky Valentine.

<http://www.facebook.com/valentinamonettaofficial>

San Marino in Eurovision

Appearances: 4
Debut: 2008
Victory: -
Best: 14th in semi final
- 2012: The Social Network Song, by Valentina Monetta 14th in the semi with 31 points
Semi Finals: -

Recent History

2012: The Social Network Song, by Valentina Monetta 14th in the semi with 31 points

2011: Stand By, by Senit, 16th in the semi with 34 points

2010: -

2013 National Final

On 30 January 2013, SMRTV held a press conference where they revealed that Valentina Monetta and the song "Crisalide (Vola)" were selected as the official entry for San Marino. "Crisalide (Vola)" was presented to the public in a television special on SMRTV on 15 March 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

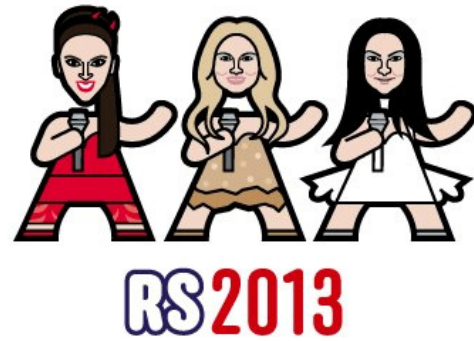
Two minutes of ballad, one minute of euro-pop, and it is absolutely joyous. Put aside memories of last year's 'Social Network Song' (still the best performing Eurovision song for San Marino) and realise that when you match the song and the singer, you get something special. I suspect the fans love for Monetta in the room is giving her more support than normal, but with the size of San Marino they need every bit of help to get out the semi-finals and perform on the Saturday night. They've certainly got the best hand possible to play for success in 2013.

Sharleen says...

Despite the clash in two styles – ballad and up-tempo pop, 'Vola' is a well-balanced piece of music rather surprisingly from Siegel. Finally the jazz vocal abilities of Monetta are on show, it doesn't feel as much a forced performance or novelty as 'The Social Network Song' last year. And emotion and ease of performing in Italian ramps this up as San Marino's best chance of escaping the semi. If San Marino only just missed qualification with last years abomination, 'Vola' should rightfully see Saturday night. It is amongst the best offerings on the Thursday night, but I can't see the predicted OGAE second place result coming true. A bottom five at final much more likely in my mind.

Your Notes

Serbia



At a Glance

Song: Ljubav Je Svuda
Artist: Moje 3
Composer: Saša Milošević Mare
Lyricist: Marina Tucaković
Performing: Semi 1, 16th

About the Artist

Mirna Radulović, Nevena Božović and Sara Jovanović gained fame through their participation in the talent show "The First Voice of Serbia".

Mirna (20) was born in the city of Subotica. She has been playing the violin, the piano and the guitar since a very young age. Mirna is adept at performing in all musical genres, from pop-rock to jazz to traditional Serbian music.

Nevena (18) was born in Kosovska Mitrovica. She is a third year student at the Belgrade Music Academy. With her song *Piši mi*, she has already gained the third place in the Junior Eurovision Song Contest 2007 in Rotterdam.

Sara (19) was born and raised in Rome. Although she is only 19 years old, she dominates the stage with her presence and movements. Sara displayed her talent for music and acting at a very early age. She is a second year student at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade, but music is currently her most important goal.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/BEOSONG-2013-Serbia/291432997643729>

Serbia in Eurovision

Appearances: 7
Debut: 2007 (in 2004 as Serbia and Montenegro)
Victory: 1
- 2007: Molitva by Marija Serifovic, with 268 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2008, 2010-2012

Recent History

2012: Nije Ljubav Stvar, by Željko Joksimović, 3rd with 214 points

2011: Čaroban, by Nina, 14th with 85 points

2010: Ovo Je Balkan by Milan Stankovic, 13th with 72 points

2013 National Final

On 28 November 2012, RTS announced that they would organize an open competition called Beosong that will consist of a semifinal, containing a maximum of 15 songs, and a final where the top five entries from the semifinal will compete for victory. The semi final was hosted on 2 March, where the 15 artists were narrowed down to just 5. On 3 March, Serbia held its final with the winner determined purely by televote. Moje 3 won with more than 5000 votes over its nearest rival.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

It's a perfectly serviceable pop song that does nothing wrong, but at the same time doesn't do anything stunning as well. After a huge push last year with Zjelko Joksimovic, Serbia's entry this year feels like they are idling along, turning up, doing the work, but clocking off at 5pm to go home. With a plumb draw in their semi-final this should be comfortably through to the finals, where it will do enough to not embarrass RTS, but neither will RTS have to worry about hosting Eurovision 2014.

Sharleen says...

Whilst Moje 3 appeared beyond tacky at the national final stages, digging further into this tune, it's a wonderful piece of accessible pop music – much like what they gave us in 2011 with Caroban. Vocally polished, it just needs a good scrub up of choreography and styling, and Serbia should see it sail through semi qualification and up to mid-table with more than just points from its neighbours.

Your Notes

Slovenia



At a Glance

Song: Straight into Love
Artist: Hannah
Composer: Hannah Mancini, Gregor Zemljic, Erik Margan, Matija Rodic
Lyricist: Hannah Mancini, Marko Primuzak
Performing: Semi 1, 3rd

About the Artist

Hannah has worked on numerous Disney movies, collaborating with top music authors and producers, such as Todd Chapman and the Grammy Award winner, Larry Klein, as well as the highly acclaimed American group Haute Chile, who used to perform as the opening act for Sheryl Crow and Seal. Hannah, who is American-born and is currently busy writing music in Europe and Slovenia having moved here from the USA six years ago after marrying a Slovenian.

During this time she has appeared on the international productions of various albums and compilations, collaborating with DJ Umek (Vice Grip, Circle Records 2009; Dementia, Hell Yeah Records 2009), the DJ and producer Sare Havliček (three singles from the album Toscana Nights, Nang Records 2010: Dreams in Light, Pleasure Storm and In/Out, and a single from her latest album Vibe on You, Nang Records 2011) and the Russian electronic music group D-Pulse (Highway to Saturn, Nang 2010).

Hannah has been the lead singer of the Xequtifz group for a number of years now, and with them she has recorded the Slovene and English versions of three radio hits. In 2011 she took part in the EMA Contest for the Slovene representative at the Eurovision Song Contest, performing the pop song *You're The One* (Sylvain, Mike Vale & Hannah). She didn't win, yet the song was a huge radio hit in Slovenia. She is currently working on her upcoming international albums (*Don't Give A Damn* by Mike Vale and *Connect Us* by Beltek).

<http://www.facebook.com/HannahEurovision>

Slovenia in Eurovision

Appearances: 19
Debut: 1993
Victory: -
Best: 7th
- 1995: Priluhni mi by Darja Švajger, with 84 points
- 2001: Energy by Nuša Derenda, with 70 points
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2007, 2011

Recent History

2012: Verjamem, by Eva Boto, 17th with 31 points

2011: No One, by Maja Keuc, 13th with 96 points

2010: Narodnozabavni rock by Ansambel Žlindra and Kalamari, 16th in semi with 6 points

2013 National Final

On 23 January 2013, RTVSLO announced that it would opt for an internal artist and song selection instead of a national final due to time constraints and reduced funding.

On 1 February, Hannah Mancini was internally selected to represent Slovenia with five composers submitting potential entries. On 14 February, "Straight Into Love", with lyrics and music by Mancini, was presented as the Slovenian song during a press conference at RTVSLO studios.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

A fantastic opening fifteen seconds, but after that the song seems to forget that it needs something more than a bass line and a singer with a decent pair of lungs repeating the song title over and over again. I've no doubt the Euroclub dance floor will like this one, but it promises so much and fails to deliver. When the majority of people voting will be sitting at home, you need more than a good club beat.

Sharleen says...

I always approach dance songs with caution when it comes to Eurovision, especially when I am yet to hear the entry perform it live. Very few acts have that ability to sing live as the nature of the music is electronic and tends to be heavily auto-tuned. Add a dance routine, it's a recipe for disaster for the inexperienced. Hannah does have pedigree though, and having now heard a live version, she does have the vocal ability. Forget the fact its generic, or that it has a dub-step element (I think for the dub-step offered at this years Eurovision, this is the most accessible version). Its just that last question that hangs in my mind... if Slovenia want to qualify, they want to steer her away from any dancing whatsoever to concentrate on what matters most.

Your Notes

Spain



ES2013

At a Glance

Song: Contigo Hasta El Final
Artist: ESDM
Composer: Raquel del Rosario, David Feito, Juan Suárez
Lyricist: Raquel del Rosario, David Feito, Juan Suárez
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

ESDM - El Sueño De Morfeo (Morpheus' Dream) is a Spanish pop-rock band with Celtic influences formed up by Raquel del Rosario from the Canary Islands, Juan Suarez and David Feito, both from northern Asturias. They have been working together for ten years and are known for their solid pop songs with rock touches and folk flavours supported by the remarkable voice of Raquel.

Fresh, young and recognisable the band ESDM delivers powerful live performances that have been successfully witnessed by more than two million people in Spain and Latin America, and has sold half a million copies of their four studio albums.

<https://www.facebook.com/eurovision>

Spain in Eurovision

Appearances: 53
Debut: 1961
Victory: 2
- 1968: La La La by Massiel, with 29 points
- 1969: Vivo Cantando by Salome, with 18 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2012: Quédate Conmigo, by Pastora Soler, 10th with 97 points
2011: Que Me Quiten Lo Bailao, by Lucia Perez, 23rd with 50 points
2010: Algo pequeñito by Daniel Diges, 15th with 68 points

2013 National Final

El Sueño de Morfeo performed three candidate songs in a televised national final that was held on 26 February 2013. One of the three finalist songs was chosen through an Internet vote where two songs competed for a spot in the final. The online vote was held from 5 February to 11 February, and users were able to cast one single vote. In the final, the winning song was selected by a combination of televoting (50%) and jury voting (50%). With the top vote from all three judges and more than 50% of the total televote, Contigo Hasta El Final was declared the winner.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

How many songs are actually on show here? There's a slow Clannad opening, there's a little tempo change turning it into the sort of Scottish Folk/Pop mashup that Runrig made their fortune with, and then it flips into Avril Lavagne's comeback single from 2023. What's more surprising is that the whole thing works well together and the band retain their own identity throughout the three minutes. It's competent, but there are far better 'smash songs together' to come (amazingly, from Ralph Siegel!!). Depending on the token draw for the Final, I'd expect SVT to open up the show on Saturday night with this one.

Sharleen says...

I am sure the Spanish fans will have high expectations for the ESDM entry, following a blistering performance from Pastora this year. And whilst the level of experience of the acts and their recognition between both years seems evenly matched, this little ditty doesn't pack quite the punch of 2012. 'El Final' falls somewhere between what we expect the Irish and Danish to give us – a celtic feel, a foot-tapper, but mashes together so many tempos sounds in the one song I feel it loses some soul and memory. Shamefully, there won't be a return to the top 10 on the cards for Spain this year, more likely bringing up the rear on Saturday.

Your Notes

Sweden



At a Glance

Song: You
Artist: Robin Stjernberg
Composer: Robin Stjernberg, Joy Deb, Linnea Deb, Joakim Harestad Haukaas
Lyricist: Robin Stjernberg, Joy Deb, Linnea Deb, Joakim Harestad Haukaas
Performing: Final, 16th

About the Artist

22-year-old Robin Stjernberg has quickly written Swedish television history twice. The first time in 2011 when he came in second in the *Idol* final with 48% of the votes, the smallest margin in the programme's history. The second time in March 2013 when he was the first artist ever who went through the "Second Chance" to win the Swedish final in *Melodifestivalen*.

In ninth grade, he was handpicked to become a member of the boyband What's Up? (which even Eric Saade was in). He also studied music at Furuboda Folkhögskola, a coveted training with many applicants and few open spots.

When his debut album "My Version" was released in 2012, it went straight into number one on the album charts.

<http://www.facebook.com/svtmelodifestivalen>

Sweden in Eurovision

Appearances: 53
Debut: 1958
Victory: 5
- 1974: Waterloo by ABBA, with 24 points
- 1984: Diggiloo Diggiley by The Herreys, with 145 points
- 1991: Fångad av en stormvind by Carola, with 146 points
- 1999: Take Me To Your Heaven by Charlotte Nilsson, with 163 points
- 2012: Euphoria, by Loreen, with 372 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2009, 2011, 2012

Recent History

2012: Euphoria, by Loreen, 1st with 372 points

2011: Popular, by Eric Saade, 3rd with 185 points

2010: This is my Life by Anna Bergendahl, 11th in the semi with 62 points

2013 National Final

Once again the massive Melodifestivalen took place from 2 February – 9 March, with 32 entries competing. 2 entries per semi of 4 directly qualified to final, and another 2 entries qualified to 2nd chance round where they went through sudden death rounds. The final 10 entries at the final competed via international juries and a percentile scored televote selection. Robin topped the international jury vote, and came second in the televote behind fan favourite Yohio who bombed with the juries. He still won with a convincing 33 combined point lead.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

I don't get the hate for this song. Stjernberg worked the rulebook at Melodifestivalen as well as Pojavis did in Lithuania. When it counted, he was in first place. 'You' is an instant, accessible, singalong number, and the stage performance fits the rising energy of the song perfectly. Stjernberg's heat was in the Malmo Arena, so his journey is about to come full circle. I'm still not sure if SVT want to 'do the double' but there's nothing in the song, singer, or staging that precludes it. The home country has a big song to get behind, and it's been a long time since we've been able to say that.

Sharleen says...

Australians love an underdog, and this song for me is no exception. Robin came through 4 rounds of voting, building a following as he went, to emerge victorious at this years Melodifestivalen. Vocally he is improving, but even with some flaws, its that big note which leaves a mark on the viewer. The song itself is a delight, and when compared to Sweden's other national final offerings, his simple staging looked classy in comparison. We all know that representing the Sweden on home soil, after a runaway winner the year before, is a tough call. If he can handle the pressure and do a confident performance such as the MF final, he has it in the bag for a place in the top 10.

Your Notes

Switzerland



At a Glance

Song: You and Me
Artist: Takasa
Composer: Georg Schlunegger, Roman Camenzind, Fred Herrmann
Lyricist: Georg Schlunegger, Roman Camenzind, Fred Herrmann
Performing: Semi 2, 16th

About the Artist

The enigmatic band name Takasa means “to make pure” in Swahili (it also stands for ‘The Artists Knowns As Salvation Army’), and epitomises the pure joie de vivre and love of music that the band embodies. It also stands for spirituality.

Takasa is made up of six individuals for whom music is a passion. Sarah is 21 years young, and Emil celebrated his 95th birthday in February. They are brought together by a shared love of music and belief in God – as members of the Salvation Army. Katharina, Sarah, Emil, Michel, Christoph and Jonas are as happy playing their music on the street as they are in church, as comfortable in a prison as they are in the Federal Parliament Building.

<http://www.facebook.com/srfesc>

Switzerland in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1956
Victory: 2
- 1956: Refrain, by Lys Assia
- 1988: Ne partez pas sans moi, by Celine Dion, with 137 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified 2005, 2006, 2011

Recent History

2012: Unbreakable, by Sinplus, 11th in the semi with 45 points

2011: In Love For a While, by Anna Rossinelli, 25th with 19 points

2010: Il Pleut De L'Or, by Michael von der Heide, 17th in the semi with 2 points.

2013 National Final

Held on 15 December 2012, 9 songs were performed in one live show. Judges passed comment, but voting was 100% public. Selection was drawn from the French-Swiss broadcasters internal selection, the Italian-Swiss from a regional heat, and a German-Swiss online vote system. Heilsarmee won with 37.53% of the televote, more than 20% over the second placed French act Carousel.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

When you look at the structure of the typical schalger song, from verse and chorus layout, to the location of the key changes and the tonics, you'll begin to realise that 'You and Me' is the cookie cutter schlager number of 2013. But that little fact is unlikely to be picked up by the typical Eurovision fan. Again, the issue is around the perception of those who are entering the song. Here it's not focusing on Switzerland, but the performers. Six members of the Salvation Army, with the backing of the organisation, has led to some raised eyebrows given the attitudes of the organisation. How much of that counts against the song will determine if the Swiss are returning to Saturday night.

Sharleen says...

If we are to judge a song on its singalong ability, Switzerland has it in the bag for Eurovision. The catchy chorus is easy to pick up on first listen, and makes me want to sing and sway along with the beat. That ability could stand it in good stead for the audience in attendance and give the arena a burst of energy it will crave this year. Vocally, I have seen Takasa perform on both ends of the spectrum, so that looms over it when trying to truly assess its ability to qualify. Its on the edge for its semi result, it could be pushed either way with the back story of Salvation Army members being mentioned, so its far too tough to call. Predicting between 8-12th place in the semi, and at the bottom half at the final should it be so lucky.

Your Notes

The Netherlands



NL2013

At a Glance

Song: Birds
Artist: Anouk
Composer: Tore Johansson, Martin Gjerstad
Lyricist: Anouk Teeuwe
Performing: Semi 1, 8th

About the Artist

In 1997, aged-22 Anouk Teeuwe stormed the Dutch musical world with her single *Nobody's Wife*, an explosive rock anthem about independence that stayed high on the Dutch charts for weeks

Two years before her big break, she was a student at the Rotterdam School of Music when she came into contact with Golden Earring singer Barry Hay, with whom she sang a few songs live at a festival in The Hague. He was so impressed with her singing that he offered to write material for her, which resulted in a first single: *Mood Indigo*.

No less than seven of the eleven albums she released are high on the Dutch album chart, and thirteen singles made the top ten. Over the years she has received many awards, including an impressive nine Edisons (the Dutch equivalent of the Grammy). In 2001 she won the Pop Award, a prestigious Dutch annual music award that is presented to a performing artist who has made an important contribution to Dutch pop music, and both in 2005 and in 2006 she won an MTV Europe Music Award for Best Dutch Act.

Anouk is internationally successful as well. *Nobody's Wife* was a great hit in Norway and Sweden, and the singer scored a number one hit in Denmark with *Lost*. In Albania the single *One Word* ended up at the top of the chart. Anouk's albums are released in Belgium, Scandinavia, Israel, Turkey and Italy.

<http://www.facebook.com/anouk>

The Netherlands in Eurovision

Appearances: 54
Debut: 1956
Victory: 4
- 1957: Net als toen by Corry Brokken, with 31 points
- 1959: Een beetje by Teddy Scholten, with 21 points
- 1969: De troubadour by Lenny Kuhr, with 18 points
- 1975: Ding-A-Dong by Teach-In, with 152 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004

Recent History

2012: You and Me, by Joan Franka, 15th with 35 points
2011: Never Alone, by 3Js, 19th in the semi with 13 points
2010: Ik ben verliefd (Sha-la-lie) by Sienneke, 14th in semi with 29 points

2013 National Final

On 17 October 2012, Anouk announced her internal selection to represent The Netherlands through a video message posted on her Facebook account. On 22 February 2013, TROS announced that Anouk would perform the song "Birds" in Malmö. The song was presented during a press conference in Hilversum on 11 March 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

How powerful is an artist's name at Eurovision? Everyone in The Netherlands knows Anouk, and by offering herself as the 2013 artist she pretty much guaranteed herself the spot. But the song is a contra-song, making a different decision at each point compared to what an audience would expect. Neither does the dutch belle command such devotions across the rest of the continent beyond a little bit of recognition for 'Lost'. Technically it's a wonderful song, but the new ranking system this year puts a premium on agreement between jury and public votes, and I think only the former will swing behind Anouk's Birds.

Sharleen says...

The pressure resting on Anouk's shoulders from even beyond Dutch borders must be immense. With a ridiculously low qualification record, there is so much expectation that sending an artist who had a hit outside of the home country (albeit a decade ago) will bring it back to final night on recognition first and foremost. But we all know that the United Kingdom fall for that every year with very mixed results. 'Birds' is a haunting tune, it should emanate from the soundtrack of Twin Peaks, and I won't deny that is certainly in the best ten of the semi. We know Anouk can perform live. On that basis alone it should qualify, but it doesn't mean it will.

Your Notes

Ukraine



At a Glance

Song: Gravity
Artist: Zlata Ognevič
Composer: Mikhail Nekrasov
Lyricist: Karen Kavalerian
Performing: Semi 1, 7th

About the Artist

Zlata Ognevič was born in the city of Murmansk located in northwest part of Russia.

After finishing two schools, comprehensive and music ones, at the age of 18, Zlata went to Kyiv, where her professional singing career started. Here, at the R.M. Glier Kyiv State Higher Music College, she refined her pop vocal skills. Then she continued her studying in the Kyiv Institute of Music, but that time at the department of jazz.

In the race for success, Zlata gained an invaluable experience in The State Song and Dance Ensemble of the Armed Forces of Ukraine where she is still a soloist.

Over the years she was the winner of the contest The First Singing Radio Hosts, the winner of the popular TV show People's Star 3, and in the autumn of 2011, Zlata represented Ukraine at the first international competition of young performers, held during the festival Crimea Music Fest in Yalta, where she took the first place and received an additional prize from press.

She is no stranger in the Eurovision Song Contest. Her first attempt was in 2010 where she finished fifth in the Ukrainian national final. Last year, Zlata took part in the Ukrainian national selection with her unique entry *The Kukushka* but came second.

<http://www.facebook.com/z.ognevich>

Ukraine in Eurovision

Appearances: 11
Debut: 2003
Victory: 1
- Wild Dances by Ruslana, with 280 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Qualified in 2004-2012

Recent History

2012: Be My Guest, by Gaitana, 15th with 65 points

2011: Angel, by Mika Newton, 4th with 159 points

2010: Sweet People by Alyosha, 10th with 108 points

2013 National Final

The Ukrainian national final was hosted on 23 December 2012, with 20 artists performing. Zlata went in as the favourite, and with 50/50 jury and televote, she won both with a perfect score. Dasha Medova came second, 3 points behind Zlata.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

An immense West-End Musical style number has been tweaked very slightly since the ukrainian National Final in December, to bring a bit more pop sensibilities into the lyrics. That helps the song for those coming to it afresh, and we're in no doubt that the stage show in Malmo is going to be huge. The EBU rules say no live animals, but there's nothing about mythical unicorns... Ukraine are already the reigning Junior Eurovision champions, and there must be someone thinking that a rather unique 'uniting' of the Contests is on the cards. All I want to know is who is the 'Mike Rafferty' that the backing singers are looking for?

Sharleen says...

Ukraine are going into 2013 with quite a serious effort on their part to not only bring the contest back to Kyiv, but to do the 'double' (ESC and JESC in one year). What does that mean for Malmo? It means they are finally sending us the powerhouse voice of Zlata that they should have sent in 2011. They are giving us something so unique sounding that it can't be compared to any other act (unless you look towards the West End rather than Eurovision). And of course, like they always do, they will bring us a memorable stage show. Mika in 2011 came 4th with a nothing song BUT great staging; likewise 2013 is lining up to be another close contest. So with a good voice, song AND staging, why wouldn't 'Gravity' not be expected to do better than that?

Your Notes

United Kingdom



At a Glance

Song: Believe in Me
Artist: Bonnie Tyler
Composer: Desmond Child, Lauren Christy, Christopher Braide
Lyricist: Desmond Child, Lauren Christy, Christopher Braide
Performing: (finalist, position tba)

About the Artist

Perhaps best known for the classic Jim Steinman songs *Total Eclipse Of The Heart* and *Holding Out For A Hero*, Bonnie Tyler has had number one albums on both sides of the Atlantic, has been nominated for three Grammys, won the Yamaha World Song Festival, and has sold over 20 million records in her career so far. She continues to tour and play live shows constantly, which she loves to do. Tyler now has a brand new album, titled *Rocks And Honey*, and her Eurovision entry, *Believe In Me*, comes from that new record.

<https://www.facebook.com/BonnieTylerOfficial?fref=ts>

United Kingdom in Eurovision

Appearances: 56
Debut: 1957
Victory: 5
- 1967: Puppet on a String by Sandie Shaw, with 47 points
- 1969: Boom Bang a Bang by Lulu, with 18 points
- 1976: Save Your Kisses For Me by Brotherhood of Man, with 164 points
- 1981: Making Your Mind Up by Bucks Fizz, with 136 points
- 1997: Love Shine a Light by Katrina and The Waves, with 227 points
Best: 1st
Semi Finals: Auto-qualify (Big 5)

Recent History

2012: Love Will Set You Free, by Engelbert Humperdinck, 25th with 12 points

2011: I Can, by Blue, 11th with 100 points

2010: That Sounds Good To Me by Josh Dubovie, 25th with 10 points

2013 National Final

The official announcement that Bonnie Tyler would represent the United Kingdom with the song "Believe in Me" was made on March 7 2013.

ESC Insight Thoughts

Ewan says...

Bonnie Tyler is making it very clear in every interview that she never submitted her CD to Eurovision, just that her producer popped it in the post to the faceless BBC... and a message came out that the UK delegation would like 'Believe in Me' as the Eurovision entry. So any issues with the song choice are completely down to Auntie's staff. Not that I'm pointing out that the buck passing has started even earlier this year, but Tyler has got her first strike in even before the results are known. Clever race, the Welsh...

Sharleen says...

I don't know what to think or expect. When I first heard that Bonnie Tyler was representing the UK, my initial reaction was 'Didn't the BBC learn their lesson last year with sending an act decades old?' Maybe on that front, I am right. But comparing Englebert to Bonnie would be a fools game. Younger generations know 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' (albeit probably the Nikki French version), and so Bonnie is somewhat more relevant, even without a hit in the past 2 decades, than the Hump was when he took to the stage. Bonnie appears to still be able to deliver, i.e. her trademark gravel voice. I am just not convinced the song is enough. You can't market on reputation alone unless you are in fact, a still charting act. It won't be last, it won't be first – the performance on the night matters most but a top 15 should be considered a result for BBC.

Your Notes